

Unbreakable

by muggleborn.dragon.ryder

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Summary: The middle of a war is not the time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

1. I Would Rather Die

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 1: I Would Rather Die

**A/N: The first chapter of the sequel. I hope you all enjoy! :)

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* * *

><p>"Humongous?" My voice came out quieter than I meant it to from lack of use.<p>

The man was polishing his sword absent-mindedly, but at my words, he looked up. "Yes?"

"Isâ€|is it just me, or are we going really slowly? I mean, we're nowhere near Berk, and we were really close to it just, I think, thirty minutes ago. In fact, it looks smaller."

Humongous walked up behind me and looked out over the horizon, shading his eyes against the glare of the sun. "Smaller?" he repeated uncomprehendingly.

"Yeah, I meanâ€|we're sailing toward it, right? But it's not getting any bigger."

"Well, Iâ€¦I don't know," he admitted confusedly. "Perhaps the ship is trapped between rocks? I mean, the water will eventually deliver us back out, butâ€¦"

"And if we are?" I demanded, turning to face Humongous, sure my fear was written all over my face. "What then?"

"It'll work out," he assured me gently, resting a hand on my shoulder. "There really is no rush in reaching Berk, is there?"

"Maybe not for you, but for me? Humongous, my whole life is somehow on that island! Everything I think I know could be a lie, and if it is, I have to know the truth." I was clutching the ship's railing so hard that my knuckles had turned white. "And Alvin's probably found out we're gone by now, so this whole place is most likely crawling with Outcasts looking for me!"

"You don't have to be afraid." Humongous replied softly, giving my shoulder a reassuring squeeze. "I'm not letting anything happen to you. Not this time."

"Hmm." I mumbled, turning to face the distant outline of Berk, which seemed a little fuzzy, but that was probably from the sun. I didn't bother telling Humongous that Alvin was probably going to find me â€" as I recalled, he was a pretty persistent Viking, and he was going to keep looking for me until he had me again. And I was going to keep trying to escape again. Essentially, we were playing a game that no one could win.

As I allowed my thoughts to drift away from what I'd left behind and towards what I was hoping to reach, my stomach gave an unpleasant jolt. All of my memories could be unlocked on that distant island, and the thought was both thrilling and terrifying. Humongous had spoken like he wasn't sure whether my real father loved me or hated me, and he had told me nothing about what my life on Berk had been like. Hell, he hadn't even been able to explain how I had lost half a leg, and suddenly there was just a metal contraption in its place. I just knew that Stoick the Vast had a ton of explaining to do.

I would get my answers. No matter if it turned out that I was unhappy on Berk and that Stoick really had been abusing me, the way Humongous had previously thought, the Hero had assured me that Toothless was waiting there for me. Even if I remembered being miserable on that island, there was nothing telling me I had to stay. I would just get to my dragon and go. Simple as that.

Humongous squinted into the bright sunlight, leaning against the boat with a sigh. "The boat should get free of the rocks once enough water pools up beneath it. When that happens, we'll start moving again."

"I don't think we're caught between rocks," I muttered. I was reluctant to admit it, because of how crazy it sounded, but I said it anyway. "I think we're going backwards."

"What?" Humongous looked at me in concern. "Is the heat getting to you, Hiccup? I know it's hot on this boatâ€¦"

"No," I replied, shaking my head. "It's justâ€¦I mean, we looked like we were getting closer earlier, and now we're just going farther awayâ€¦"

"But the wind is on our side, and the current's pulling us towards the island," Humongous pointed out what I already knew, playing with the hilt of his sword in nervous habit. "And if it does start pushing us back, I think they might have a few pairs of oars below deck, so we can always use thoseâ€¦"

I nodded uneasily as I watched the Hero unsheathe his sword fully and scan the surrounding area. "There's somethingâ€¦here," he whispered, taking a quick step away from the railing, so he stood in the middle of the deck. "It's like fog. We might be sailing into some fog, which would be making the island hard to seeâ€¦"

"No," I shook my head. "It's getting smaller, I know it."

Humongous drew in a breath. "This fog really is thickâ€¦if we don't reach that island within an hour, Hiccup, we won't be able to see a thing in any direction, and we can forget reaching Berk until it clears up again."

"And how long will it take the fog to clear?" I demanded. I knew I sounded a little impatient, but I think you'd be just a trifle impatient, too, if you suddenly realized that you'd lost half a leg, and the man who raised you was not really your father. Your father in fact, could be a fantastic man who loved you more than life itself, or a horrible, violent chieftain who did nothing but abuse you. So, maybe that explains why I was feeling so restless.

"Shouldn't take more than a couple hours," Humongous responded. "And we'd have to contend with it to make sure we didn't end up in the middle of nowhere while we were drifting and unable to see."

I rubbed a hand along my forehead with a little sigh as I glanced out at the thickening fog. It really was getting dense fastâ€¦faster than any regular fog I'd seenâ€¦

The back of my neck prickled suddenly.

"It'll be okay," Humongous reached over and rubbed my shoulder blades soothingly.

"Humongousâ€¦" I leaned over and tried to keep my voice low as I spoke. "I don't think this is regularâ€¦"

"I'm sorry to interrupt this little escapade, but, Hiccup, I'm afraid you won't be reaching Berk today." A sudden voice interrupted our hasty whispers, and I'm pretty sure I jumped about a foot in the air. Humongous turned suddenly, fumbling to grab his sword. I saw my father â€" or not my father, but the man who I'd thought was my father for sixteen years â€" climbing onto our ship through the thickening fog, a horrible smile curling his face. His eyes sparkled with malice.

"Or ever," he added for emphasis.

Humongous looked a little shaky, but his sword was steady in his grip. "Get out of here."

Just as I had expected, the old woman I had seen in my cell appeared swiftly beside my father " or _not_ my father" hell, I didn't know anymore " as suddenly as if she had used magic. Humongous' eyes blazed with rage. "Get off of our ship!"

"After all of the time it took to get you here?" the woman raised a thin white eyebrow, shaking out her long hair. "No, I don't think so. Setting it all up so you dolts wouldn't think we'd organized the escape plan was bad enough, but"

"Organized?" I sputtered, surprised out of my fear. "What"

"Well, we knew you wouldn't go anywhere with us willingly, if you had lost your memory, you revolting boy," the woman snapped at me, her pale eyes falling onto me instead. "Besides, I like to keep things interesting. Like right now, for example. We could have just hijacked your ship and waited until you'd reached 'Berk'." here she put finger quotes around the name, pointing ahead for us to see that the suddenly much closer outline was not Berk at all, but an unrecognizable land. "But I decided to dispose of the useless ones while I still could. Like you, for example." She nodded politely at Humongous.

"I'm getting him to Berk if it kills me." Humongous snarled, his grip on his sword tightening.

"Very interesting," the woman replied softly. "Because it just might. You never know."

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Nobody's dying!" I put in.

"Nobody who we still need." Once again, she turned her pale gaze on me. "Be grateful, Hiccup " you're still needed. You're not dying" not yet."

"I would rather die than go anywhere with you."

"Well, we don't always get what we want, do we?" The eerie fog thinned just as suddenly as it had come upon us. When I saw the woman putting her hands out, shooing the fog away, it just confirmed my growing suspicions. "You don't really have a choice." She pointed to the Outcast warships in a semicircle, canons loaded, archers with drawn bowstrings on the railing. "You're completely surrounded. Now come with us like a good little boy, and we don't have to hurt you."

2. Fallen Hero

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 2: Fallen Hero

A/N: I know this chapter is kind of heavy, but I bring good news: the angst factor is now higher than ever! :D

Oh, as for where Alvin went, you'll find that out next chapter :D

* * *

><p>"Hiccup's not going anywhere with you," Humongous snarled, but moments after he'd said it, he was leaning down next to me, whispering very quickly and urgently in my ear. "Hiccup, I think she's going to be using some strong magic to win this fight, you need to get away right now."<p>

"I can't just leave you here," I mouthed at him as he straightened back up, his face regaining the grim and determined look " or maybe he'd never lost it in the first place.

"You have to," he whispered, but his gaze was fixed on my father " or whoever he was, I didn't know anymore " and the woman beside him. "First chance you have, take it."

I wasn't sure when any chances would arise, but within moments, the woman was cupping her hands together, and my father " or _not_ my father " was coming towards us with his sword now unsheathed.

Humongous frowned, tightening his grip on his own weapon. "Get back." He took a quick step in front of me. "Get away from him, Alvin."

"I'm surprised at you, Humongous." My father whispered, a malicious glint in his eye. I had come to recognize that look, and learned to hate it, but Humongous hadn't. My breath caught in my throat, and I suddenly knew something was going to happen that I didn't want to.

"Humongous!" I whispered uneasily, reaching up to try and tug on his sleeve, but he wasn't listening to me; his eyes were fixed solely on the man in front of him.

"I didn't think a great, honest, noble Hero like yourself would ever turn traitor," my father continued.

My eyes flicked over to the woman, distracting me from warning Humongous. Her eyes were squeezed shut, and she looked like she was doing something very complicated by the way she kept moving her hands.

She was performing some sort of spell, that much was clear—but I could see her lips moving, and knew she must be chanting under her breath. What kind of spell was she doing, exactly?

"It's you who's the traitor," Humongous growled. "You lied to me!"

"What did you expect, dolt?" My father replied, and he sounded a little amused now. "When somebody gives you the line 'word of a Treacherous', you don't know to never believe them for an instant? For the love of Loki, who taught you that you were smart?"

Humongous scowled. "It takes a horrible person to trick somebody who honestly trusts them." His voice was softer now and he sounded pitying. "And it takes an even worse person to go around throwing it in their face again. I honestly believed you, I thought Hiccup was yours. See if I'll ever help you again."

"No, no," my father persisted, smiling a little. "That's the great thing: we don't need you anymore. So, you can just get out of my way, if you please, and Hiccup and I will be on our way"

"No, you won't be on your way," the Hero snapped. "I am not letting you take Hiccup again. That's the kind of mistake I'll make only once."

"Your choice," my father shrugged, and swung his sword.

With lightning-fast reflexes, Humongous brought his own blade up to meet my father's.

"**Godway!" **The white-haired woman shrieked, throwing her hands out at last and opening her eyes.

Smoke enveloped the scene, and I twisted around suddenly, looking through the thick gray fog settling over the ship. I could see nothing, but all around me, I could hear people yelling. Some were cursing out the woman, for performing her spell too soon, but the clash of metal-on-metal let me know that Humongous and my father "Alvin, I mean" had found each other once again, and were resuming their match.

"Hiccup!" Humongous yelled through the smoke. I heard him give a sharp cry of pain.

"Humongous!" I shouted back frantically, tripping over myself to find him.

"Remember what I told you!" he panted from somewhere to my right. "Take the chance!"

I hesitated for a split second. "I can't leave you here!"

"I'll_ouch_! I'll be fine, you just go!"

"Go where?" Another man called, appearing suddenly behind me. I could tell he was an Outcast, but he didn't look ready to hurt me. "The whole darned ship is covered in smoke, we can't see a thing!"

"Not you!" Humongous cried, appearing in front of us for a brief moment before my father "Alvin" hauled him back again. "I meant Hiccup!"

Sharp shouts of pain echoed all around as I bit my lip, my mind whirling with possibilities. I could jump ship, provided I could find the railing—but I couldn't get to Berk anyway. Humongous must have known that. I heard the woman chanting again, and this time, I was hurled off the ship, up out of the smoke, as was my "Alvin and Humongous as well."

I twisted around in midair, reaching for Humongous, but I couldn't seem to find him. The ground was rushing up to meet me, and I was reluctantly forced to conclude that this was not the relaxed freefall I was so used to doing with my dragon. I took a deep breath and readied myself for the impact. Come to think of it, I wasn't even sure how I'd gotten up in the air. The woman had done something, some strange spell, but I didn't think she'd meant to send all three of us up in the air like that.

Sure enough, I heard her shouting distantly somewhere far below us, just before I landed heavily, on rough and gritty sand. Something in my shoulder snapped, and a dizzying pain shot through me, so blinding that I could barely move. I lay there for a few moments before my mind drifted back to my father—Alvin and the woman, and I sat upright, clutching at my shoulder and struggling to my feet. Humongous was lying some distance away, unmoving, his sword still clutched in his hand.

"Humongous!" I scrambled over to him, half-walking, half-dragging myself over, putting out my good arm and shaking his shoulder. "Hey, c'mon, get up, this is no time for sleeping! I mean, you did great in that sword fight, so let's try—"
"Humongous? Humongous!"

He wasn't responding to my touch. His blue eyes weren't snapping open. He lay there unmoving, and suddenly a horrible thought overcame me. He couldn't be—no, he couldn't be, he had been alive when I had last seen him—

And then my worst fears were confirmed when I realized the sand was unexpectedly wet and bright red where he lay, a scarlet stain constantly growing around us, the knees of my leggings soaked in his blood.

"Humongous!" Frantically, forgetting about my shoulder and jamming my ear on his chest, I pressed my head against his still body and listened, willing his heart with everything I had to beat again, as if I thought I could give him some of my own lifespan.

His heart wasn't beating. He wasn't responding, even when I began to yell at him, scream at him to wake up and stop joking _because for Thor's sake it isn't funny anymore_!

I stared down into the pale, bloodless face, and I couldn't define the feeling in my chest, the strange squeezing in my heart. I had known people who had died before, but I had never actually seen them after it had happened. I had never seen a wound like I did then, not a fatal one that was still coloring the ground around us.

The sight of the blood hardly even bothered me like it might have previously; I could hardly take my eyes off the deathly pale face. "Humongous," I breathed through very numb lips, "Humongous—"

3. His Move

Unbreakable

_The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'. _

Chapter 3: His Move

****A/N:** I really need to get back to work on my Camp story -- This wouldn't be such a big deal, seeing as I'm at almost 19k, I think, except there's this dweeb in my cabin who started a war with me to see who could be done first and he's at like, 25k now. So. Now I have to catch up to said dweeb. I was telling my friend this tragic story about him pulling ahead of me, and she said, "Maybe he's somewhere cursing you, too." And that was when I decided she was amazing at encouraging me xD ******

****I'm** trying to be mature about this war, but ughhh he's not even doing anything on the side, and I am ;-; I'm doing so many freaking fanfictions on the side ;-; and my stomach's been hurting all day and it's finally stopped and now I want to eat something, but I just don't know what. And also, I want to blow off writing and rewatch the Lorax. For some reason, I have an urge to watch all the Onceler scenes. Especially the scene where his mother comes to the valley, and is all like, "Oncie, is that you?" Which I don't know why, because I can't stand the mother whatsoever. Or O'Hare, for that matter. ******

****Speaking** of the Lorax...I'd better update Drifting soon, huh? Where does the time go, crud...******

****Also,** for the sake of my more distressed readers, please don't be too angry with me for killing off a character that some of you might have grown to like. I know quite a few of you had mixed feelings about it, but to be honest, and not to give too much away, but Hiccup needs to be completely alone for the plot to actually get started. So Humongous was done away with rather quickly.******

****Also,** I want to address the fact that Hiccup pulls himself together rather quickly after Humongous' death. In my observations, he's the kind of person who never gives up when there's something to be done. For instance, in HTTYD2, when all the...things happened (I skate around the topic for the sake of those who haven't yet seen it) Hiccup bounced back rather quickly, and I felt that that was because there was still all the other junk to be taken care of, and he just couldn't allow himself to properly feel anything about it until all that junk was taken care of. So. ******

* * *

><p>I didn't want to leave Humongous' side. I clung to his cold white hand, staring down into the pale face, but I didn't want to get up. I knew that's what I should have done. I should have gotten up, tried to locate where Berk was, and gone there when the first chance arose, but I couldn't do it. I couldn't imagine doing something that complicated when I could barely even move.<p>

I stared down in numb shock at the Hero I had come to admire. He'd tried to teach me how to sword fight for days on end, despite the fact that I could barely lift any weapons. And he'd rescued me from Alvin's cell, and he'd called me little Hiccup, which would have been an annoying and demeaning nickname coming from anybody but him. And he'd saved me from that ice dragon, and he'd been so nice to me when I was on Berk, and

With a sudden jolt, I realized I was remembering things from my stay on Berk. Little flashes, mere snippets of things I half-remembered, but memories all the same. Humongous arguing with Stoick the Vast, Humongous lending me his coat when I stood there sodden and shivering, Humongous taking me aside, telling me that I couldn't trust somebodyâ€¦_but who_?

I struggled to remember, struggled to grasp onto it, but nothing was coming to me. My brain kept shying away, as if trying to tell me that I wasn't getting any more snippets.

I gave Humongous' hand a light squeeze, half-expecting him to offer me one in return. It seemed so wrong to me that those blue eyes would never again open, I would never see them gain that twinkle of adventure. I would never see him smile again. I would never hear him call me little Hiccup. I couldn't wrap my mind around it. Humongous just seemed permanent to me, immortal. He would always be around, always and forever, no matter who else fell around him. I couldn't imagine _him_ being the fallen.

Distant, sudden voices made me glance up, towards the water. "We'll find him!" Alvin cried, slamming a fist into his palm for emphasis. "We'll find them, make no mistake about it!"

"I saw him land there!" One of the Outcasts volunteered eagerly, pointing to an island outside my line of vision.

"No, he landed over there!" Another pointed at the shore I currently rested on, and my heart sped up slightly.

"We'll check both areas, to be sure!" Alvin barked. "Mother, you come with me, we'll check there," he tilted his head again, in the direction where Humongous and I resided. "Savage, Kar, Rin and Dundle, you all come with me as well. The rest of you can go check out the other island."

These words made me jump to my feet, but I glanced down at Humongous' still form one last time. I had heard words of sorrow spoken before over people I cared about, but somehow it seemed wrong to just walk away without doing anything for him. I could have even done something small, like lighting a little candle beside him and holding it there until it burned out, or something like that, but there were no candles here.

It just felt so wrong to leave. Humongous had given his life for mine. I slowly sank to my knees again, stared down into the pale face, gave the cold hand another squeeze. "Goodbye, Humongous."

The Hero lay still.

"Thank you," I whispered to him softly, unable to take my eyes off him. I knew I should have gotten up long ago, but I could hear the boat drawing farther away, and I couldn't move. "Thank you forâ€¦for everything, you wereâ€¦such a great Hero, Iâ€¦I can't even begin to describe how much I admire you. Your bravery. Iâ€¦I don't understand how somebody could beâ€¦that brave that they'dâ€¦they'd give their life for somebody else's. Somebody who doesn't matter as much. But you won't have done it in vain, I promise. I wasn't worth dying for today, but I'll make sure that you didn't do this in vain. I'll make sure of that."

I slowly eased my hand off Humongous', staring down at him for a long second. This was final. If I stood up and left now, I would be letting him go. I would be saying goodbye.

I slowly rose to my feet, but I didn't walk away right then. I continued to watch him, knowing that he wasn't going to move, knowing that by now, even the blood had ceased its flowing. He wasn't going to suddenly rise up and ruffle my hair again; he wasn't here to help me anymore. But he had given me his all. He had tried to help me. And I had failed at returning the favor.

But he wasn't going to die in vain. I felt sure of that. I was not going to let that happen. I swallowed and took a deep breath. I watched the ship drawing ever nearer to us, this tiny little island. I ducked away, behind the growing vegetation, hoping to lose myself in the forest. If I couldn't find my way back to the beach, I hoped that the Outcasts wouldn't be able to, either.

I went left for a bit and began leaving a false trail. I knew that Alvin was used to me trying to escape, and would probably think I had learned the best way to cover my tracks, but with any luck, this would fool him at least for a little while. Long enough to let me go in the opposite direction, get a bit of a head start.

It was kind of slow going for a bit, because I had to be gentle with my shoulder, which increased my feelings of helpless weakness. That was the emotion that plagued me when I dared to allow my thoughts to stray to Humongous, still sleeping peacefully on the beach. I regretted that he wasn't going to receive a proper Viking funeral, like he deserved, but the tide had been coming in when I'd left him there, and I hoped that the water would come in and carry him out to sea. My own little version of a funeral. It was the best I could do, but it wasn't enough.

And when the Outcasts reached shore, I paused for a moment, watching them through the thick trees as I ran back the way I'd come, biting my tongue so I wouldn't cry out when branches scratched at my injured shoulder. I didn't know what was wrong with it, if it was broken or fractured or just dislocated, but whatever it was, I had heard something snap and it hurt like hell.

"Where has he gone?" Alvin barked suddenly and I stopped cold, cradling my shoulder and realizing they had found Humongous. The tide had not brought him out yet, so he still lay there on the beach, looking as if he were doing nothing more than sleeping.

He put an ear to the man's chest, listening.

"Alvin," Savage rasped. "Alvin, don't waste your time. He's dead."

Alvin froze. And then his lips curled up into a smile. "Oh. Perfect." I didn't sense any sarcasm in the statement, and I was usually good at catching it, so it confused me.

Savage looked frightened for his chief's sanity. "Alvinâ€¦?"

"Don't any of you get it? The boy's all alone somewhere on this island! Stumbling around, probably crying his weak little heart out

and leaving a trail of clues so wide that any idiot could track him!
This is _perfect_!"

"Why doesn't the woman just track him?" One of the men demanded,
raising a taunting brow.

The white-haired woman folded her hands and stared serenely at the
Outcast challenging her. "I'm afraid I'm unable to do so on an island
like this. So don't ask me again."

_An island like this? _

Good news for me. But confusing.

And Alvin's news was also good news for me. He thought I was mad with
grief, and too stupid to remember that he'd be looking for me. But
he'd underestimated me. I was one step ahead of him this time, and
now it was his move.

4. Burglar Alarm

Unbreakable

_The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover
that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star
Bright'._

Chapter 4: Burglar Alarm

**A/N: Awkward chapter title. Awkward chapter. Awkward everything.
Frick, guys, this wasn't even in the freaking outline. This was
completely made up. I really like what's coming next, though, way too
much to do away with this rather awkward chapter.**

**In other news, I hit 23k on Camp! :D and I can never convince
anybody to play chess with me, because apparently I always win or
some nonsense, so I tried a computerized version and I beat it in
five seconds on one round xD **

* * *

><p>When I heard Alvin and his men blundering down the false trail, I
started in the opposite direction, one hand on my bad shoulder as I
stumbled painfully through the bracken and heather. I thought I heard
them calling to each other for a bit, excitedly reporting signs of my
presence in the woods, but a sudden, shrill chirping noise drove them
straight from my mind. I wasn't sure where it was coming from, but I
stared at the suddenly rustling bushes apprehensively, half-waiting
for Savage or one of the other Outcasts to jump out at me and drag me
away.<p>

To my relief, however, it was just a small, bright gold dragon that
hopped out of the brush and blinked large black eyes up at me,
tilting his head questioningly.

I offered him a wave. The dragon stared up at me curiously for a
second, and I knelt down so the little guy wouldn't crane his neck.
He hopped cautiously up onto my arm, but it was clear that he was too
young to have yet been taught all the dangers of Vikings.

He crawled up onto my good shoulder, staring into my eyes with a kind of fierce intensity. He gave my neck a delicate sniff, my cheek a hasty lick, and then he flapped off, flopping onto the ground, his wings at an awkward angle. I had never seen a breed like this before, but by the shape of his wings, I suspected he wasn't a very capable flier.

He jumped up onto his feet the moment he touched the ground, and began scrabbling endlessly at the dirt.

"What are you doing?" I asked, slightly amused, for once forgetting all about the Outcasts. "Searching for buried treasure or something?"

The dragon looked at me and nodded seriously before returning to his task.

"Wait, you mean, like you're actually looking for buried treasure?" I demanded, leaning forward suddenly.

He nodded again, a little impatiently this time.

"Oh. Well, if there was any treasure, I think this is the last place I would expect anyone to buryâ€"

He flicked a gold coin into my lap with his tail. I picked it up carefully, examining it. It was thick, and the sheen was so shiny and clear that I could see my reflection in it. I looked slightly crazy, all dark shadows beneath huge green eyes that looked too big for my face, and leaves and twigs tangled in my hair. I rarely ever thought about my appearance, if you didn't count my size, because I had long since given up on ever being good-looking.

I tossed the gold coin back at the dragon, who just cocked his head and gave me a questioning look. There were more gold coins in a pile beside him, a fact he seemed rather smug about.

"I can't just go around stealing money," I told the little creature, giving him a grateful head pat all the same. "I don't know when the true owners might be back to get it." I tossed the coin back into the shallow hole that the dragon had already made, and he looked slightly offended.

"Not that I don't appreciate the effortâ€" I began quickly, but suddenly the creature rose up on his hind legs, looked to the sky and sniffed the air in acute concentration.

Without warning, he plunged into the thick green trees, and I followed after him without thinking, trying to call out for him quietly, which was impossible.

"What are you doing?" I panted when we finally emerged out onto the beach. My heart squeezed. The tide had still not stolen Humongous' cold white body away, but the dragon barely even registered that he was there.

He dived straight for the Hero, digging in the huge black pockets before drawing out a golden, dragon-shaped bracelet in his teeth, with a bright red jewel set within the eye. He dropped it into my

hand, and I stared down at it for a second, sparkling and glittering in the spring sunlight. And then I tried to hand it back to the little dragon. "No, I'm sorry. I can't accept this. He was my friend, I can't go stealing his riches."

Again, the dragon seemed slightly offended, and he refused to take it back.

"No, you don't understand, I appreciate the thought, but I don't wantâ€"

"THERE HE IS!"

"WE'VE FOUND HIM!"

"Oh, no," I mumbled, taking off in the direction of the woods again, the dragon right behind me, weaving in and out of the trees the whole way there.

The clear, rich gold of the jewelry had been cold when I'd first held it, but it adjusted to the heat of my fingers, and slowly warmed in my hand as I ran as fast as I could. I could hear the Outcasts just behind me, crashing through the undergrowth, making as much noise as possible, probably to alert Alvin. Indeed, a few Outcasts stopped to launch arrows into the sky, and I heard cries from the far end of the island. I barely stayed ahead of them, the dragon flapping anxiously above me the whole way there.

"I'll be fine," I whispered to the little guy, trying to swat him away. "What's important is that you leave here. Alvin can be crueler to dragons than he is to humansâ€"

The dragon fixed me with a rather stubborn look, and I gave up, before emerging into a clearing of startling beauty. The grass was a much brighter green than I was used to, and there were flowers of all kinds growing in a tight ring in the very center of the meadow. Birds and dragons alike, both with no fear of the other, sat in trees, the birds singing sweetly to the sky and the dragons flapping about in tight circles, performing daring tricks in midair.

For a moment, I forgot myself in the beauty around me, turning slowly on the spot, trying to memorize it all. The birds' sweet cries turned suddenly to chirps of fear, and the grass crumbled and crackled under my feet, instantly turning dead and brown as an Outcast launched himself in the clearing. I let out a cry as the flowers transformed suddenly into snakes, coiling themselves around the man and hissing loudly. The birds kept lamenting sadly, and every one of them turned their backs upon the meadow, put their heads beneath their wing, their trills going higher and higher. The flowers tightened their grip around the Outcast's chest, and the man's face turned blue. The grass rose beneath him and suddenly swallowed him whole, forcing him beneath the earth forever.

I couldn't hear the other Outcasts now, but then, I couldn't hear anything; I could only stare in shock at where the man had been sitting, only seconds before, feeling my heart pumping loudly in my ears. The golden dragon beside me chirped suddenly and I started; I had nearly forgotten he was there in the horror of what had just happened. The dragon tugged me frantically along, giving me a shove across the grass, returning suddenly to the emerald green it used to

be.

"Whatâ€¦" I began shakily, tripping all over myself on trembling legs. "What just happened?"

I didn't really expect the dragon to have an answer, and the beast merely blinked solemnly at me, seemingly undeterred by the horrible death he had just witnessed.

"What was that?" I repeated, mostly to myself, wishing somebody else had an answer.

And then my wish came true.

"Oh, just a little burglar alarm, if you will," A voice spoke suddenly from somewhere above me, and I jumped, looking up and around myself for the speaker.

5. Start Talking

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 5: Start Talking

**A/N: Welllll, I bet you guys can guess who the speaker is, huh? xD I made it painfully obvious, I felt, but some of you apparently guessed Valka, and not this guy xD But I liked this guy better, personally. Anyway. This chapter was actually tons of fun to write, even though I'm not really sure I kept him IC enough. **

* * *

><p>I looked around for the speaker, but I didn't see anyone. That is, until they dropped down from the tree above me, and he landed right in front of me. I gave a bit of a start, taking a couple quick steps backward. Hey, if this guy claimed that a garden that ate people was just a "little burglar alarm" who knew how crazy he was?<p>

"Ah, ah, ah!" He held his hands up. "Relax." His smile was charming and friendly, but his hazel eyes were cold. He was good-looking, with brown hair parted on the sides, black war paint covering his chin, and thick fur clothing protecting him from the cold. "If my burglar alarm deemed you trustworthy, I'm certainly not going to go against its judgement."

"What do you mean?" I hated that I stuttered slightly, as if I was afraid of him. And I wasn't, honestly. Alvin was twice this guy's size. It was just that, I was a little shaky from everything that had happened that day, and I hope this is understandable.

He seemed to enjoy the stutter, because he kind of smirked. "My burglar alarm hasn't let anyone pass through for years. It normally takes the ones that are after my treasures."

"But I'm not after your treasures!" I mumbled, mostly to myself.

He rolled his eyes. "I know that, idiot. What I mean is, the garden senses a person's greed. If that person is greedy, if they would gladly pillage all of my gold and jewels and leave me left for dead without even turning a hair, the garden looks out for me. And takes away the possibility of that ever happening."

"By killing people?" I sputtered. "You're just as bad as the people after your treasure, then!"

He smiled. "Maybe. But hell, I'm alive and I'm rich. And I plan to stay that way. So, I'm sorry, but I can't have you running all over the Archipelago telling people about me."

"I don't even know your name!"

He shrugged. "I don't like taking risks."

"Listen, I'm just trying to"

"HUSH!" He suddenly jerked me down to the ground by my vest, inching out a little farther to peer between the trees.

Loud, thumping footsteps could be heard, and Alvin's men appeared from behind the trees. The only thing separating them from me was the garden. I had seen its horrors for myself, but I couldn't help the flash of fear when Alvin himself stepped onto the very edges of the bright green grass, looking around at the clearing. The white-haired woman appeared very suddenly behind him, and just in time, too: he had been about to set his foot down upon the grass.

"Wait!" she cried, making him turn. She grabbed at his wrist, tugging him away from the grass. "You can't go in there, any of you! That garden can kill you!"

Alvin cocked an eyebrow. Some of the men chuckled.

The woman's pale face flushed. "Go ahead! Go into the garden, all of you! You'll be sorry you didn't listen to me!"

"Why can't we just use your magic powers to get us out?" One of the men mocked.

"I told you, my magic won't help us here! Not on an island like this!"

"You're a fraud!"

"Enough!" Alvin snapped at the Outcast. "If she says to leave this place alone, we leave it alone!"

I glanced over at the man beside me to see his eyes had gone wide, his mouth hanging in a perfect 'O' shape. When those wide eyes landed on Alvin, he looked as scared as I felt. I nudged him gently with my shoulder. He glanced back at me, biting his lip nervously. When Alvin disappeared back into the trees, taking his Outcasts and the white-haired woman with him, the man was instantly on his feet, almost wringing his hands. "Outcasts! On my shores!"

I watched him pacing back and forth, clearly terrified, and realized I had brought a battle to a place of relative peace. If you could call a man-eating garden peaceful, I guess. "I'm sorry," I mumbled, picking at a blade of grass as I spoke. "I had no idea there were other people living here, I thought this place was desertedâ€¦"

"Outcasts!" he cried again, but then he seemed to hear me, his mouth drawing up into a sneer. "What about you?! Are you an Outcast, too?!"

"No!" I managed quickly, holding up my hands to defend myself before lowering them slightly. "Wellâ€¦ I guess I amâ€¦ I mean, I'm not, I'm really not, because I'm not like them, and apparently my father is Stoick the Vast, the chief of Berk and all, butâ€¦" I cut myself off when I realized how much I was telling this perfect stranger.

"Outcast, but not an Outcast?" He raised one eyebrow, giving a little chuckle. "Make up your mind, man, are you or aren't you?"

"I'm not," I said firmly. "I'm definitely not."

"Then why do you apologize?"

"Becauseâ€¦ becauseâ€¦" I hesitated, wondering how much to tell him. "The Outcasts are looking for me."

His eyes darkened. "What have you done to them?"

"Nothing," I replied heatedly, before Toothless came flitting to the forefront of my mind. And then I sighed. "Well, apparently something, according to their chieftain, but I don't really see what's so wrong about it."

"What'd you do?" he demanded.

"I don't see why that's any of yourâ€¦"

Within seconds, his blade was pressing into my throat, cold metal on my skin. "You forget, my garden isn't the only thing on this island that knows how to kill. Start talking, and I might let you live."

6. Promise

Unbreakable

_The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'. _

Chapter 6: Promises

**A/N: Okay, um, how stupid is this chapter, on a scale of 1-10? 10 being the stupidest and 1 being the best. IDK, guys. I just do not know. You guys probably think this guy is Drago now. It's not. I really need to get around to Hiccup learning his name huh -- I'll

cover that in chapter 7. **

* * *

><p>It's not easy to think when a blade is at your throat, inches away from separating your head from your shoulders. And I saw in the man's unblinking, unflinching golden eyes that he would not bat an eye if he had to kill me.<p>

My mouth was dry, so I licked my lips and swallowed, trying to suck in a breath, despite the sword pressing into my air passageways. "Can you move your sword a little, I can barely breathe," I managed to choke out.

He frowned. "What did you think was my intention?"

"To kill me before I can even clear my name?" My eyes watered and I coughed, pulling away slightly, taking a grateful breath before his sword was back in its original position, pressing into my neck.

His frown grew bigger, and he adjusted the sword slightly. "Stay still," he instructed angrily. "And talk. I'm sure you can fight the discomfort."

"Umâ€|okayâ€|I did something the Outcasts didn't like, and now they're looking for revenge. I mean, they already got revenge, considering those four years that they had me locked away in a cell, butâ€|"

He raised an eyebrow, but those golden eyes softened just slightly. "Four years in a cell?"

I started to nod, and then became concerned that this would lead to getting a nick, so I just confirmed it with words instead. "It was a bit of a downer."

Unexpectedly, he smiled. His eyes twinkled with just the faintest hint of amusement. "What did you do to receive such a sentence?"

I bit my lip.

He waited patiently, but the sword inched closer, threatening to restrict my breathing again.

"You won't believe me, even if I say it," I said, my voice a little choked from the blade. This, I decided, was the last time I wanted to get up close and personal with a weapon owned by somebody who wanted to kill me. I had had far too much experience with that.

"Try me," he replied.

"I trained a dragon."

He smirked. "I believe you."

"So, you don't believe dragons are virtually untrainable creatures?" I asked hopefully, sitting up a little straighter. Hey, if this guy believed the same as I did about dragons, maybe we were off to a slightly better start than we had been ten minutes ago.

"Of course not." He rolled his eyes. "People just jump to conclusions, and Vikings think that fighting the world is going to take them places."

"Are you friends with the dragons on this island, then?"

He stared at me for a second, and that odd softness in his eyes disappeared. He threw back his head and laughed, as if waiting for me to get the joke as well. I offered a soft chortle, as if thinking that I had told one all along.

"Friends?" he demanded finally, once he'd recovered from his laughing fit. "Dragons aren't our friends, boy. They're just stupid animals, and they're beneath us."

"That's not true!" I countered hotly. "Dragons are just like the rest of us, they're just asâ€¦just as human, some of them even more soâ€¦"

"No wonder the Outcasts locked you up!" He exclaimed, still with that cold and aloof amusement lingering in his tone. "They did it for your own good! Hell, I have half a mind to chuck you back out there with them right now!"

"No!" My mind jumped from the heated debate about dragons to what Alvin would do to me if this man really did that. "No, you can't!"

"It'd be fairly easy, actually," he told me. "I could fling you over one shoulder like a toddler. I bet you're not even sixty pounds."

"I'm _seventy_" I corrected angrily. "And you can't throw me out there to Alvin, you really can't, Iâ€¦don't. Don't." I didn't want to beg him. I didn't want to lower myself to that, so I didn't add 'please' or anything like that â€¦ I tried to sound more commanding than pathetic.

"Are you sure their cell wasn't a makeshift asylum?" he asked.

"Very sure," I snapped. "I'm not crazy, and I can prove that dragons can be friends!"

"Oh, this I have to see," he responded simply.

I scowled at him, turning to grab the golden dragon that had been digging up the treasure, but he wasn't there. He had disappeared, seemingly into thin air. "I can prove itâ€¦wait, where did he go?"

The man chuckled lightly. "You see? Dragons can't be friends! They aren't loyal to anyone! The only way to control them is through fear!"

"That's not true!"

"Then why did that dragon abandon you when it saw you were being threatened?" When I didn't respond, a smirk stretched across his face. "You know it's true. Dragons are heartless creatures, and the only way to get through to them is to just trap them and force them

to work for you."

"Is that what you've been doing then!" It was strange to feel so angry, because that was not an emotion high on my list of the often felt. Sadness and fear were much closer to the top than anger was. "You take the dragons from this island, and you beat them until they fear you and youâ€"

His eyes widened. "You've got this all wrong! I don't lay a hand on those creatures! I did what I had to do when I washed up here! And they're all a bunch of brainless lizards anyway, why should you care!"

"One of my best friends is a dragon!"

"I guarantee he only stays with you because he's afraid of you."

"He's not afraid of me! I never once used fear as a motivator with him! He trusts me!"

"Well, he doesn't need you otherwise."

I frowned at the truth in his statement. "Well, that doesn't matter! The point is, he doesn't stay with me out of fear. He stays with me because he's my friend."

"Uh-huh." He shook his head, clearly amused. "Listen, I think maybe things might be better for all of us if you just walked back the way you came, and let the Outcasts have their way with you."

"I would rather hang myself from the nearest tree," I snapped furiously. "And if you don't believe what I'm telling you about dragons, then let me show you! Hold onâ€|watchâ€|hold onâ€|we'll need to find a dragon, obviouslyâ€|do you know where they all are?"

"Oh, this is going to be worth a laugh," he crossed his arms, leaning against the nearest tree. "Maybe the dragons will take care of you themselves, and I won't have to deal with your blood on my hands as well."

"Not that you'd care," I replied coldly. "You clearly have no qualms." I gestured to his carnivorous garden just outside the thicket of trees.

He rolled his eyes. "You're still on the burglar alarm, aren't you? Listen, you don't even need to steer clear of it! I can't imagine why â€" that is unimaginably rare, my garden letting somebody pass throughâ€|I kept waiting for it to swallow you up, too, but you were still standing, even after the other man was already gone. What is that about?"

"I'm not interested in your treasure."

"Then why are you so interested in the treasure-hunting dragons?"

"Because what I'm interested in is that you stop killing them. Also, I kind of need a ride off this island, soâ€"

He shook his head. "Dragons don't deal well with riders. I found that out the hard way." He kind of winced, and I shuddered to think what methods he had used to get on the creature's back.

"I ride the dragon that I befriended that I was telling you about."

His eyebrows flew up. "You discovered the way to ride them?" he leaned forward, away from the tree trunk almost excitedly, as if this was information he had been waiting for all his life.

I nodded hesitantly. "But I'm only going to show you how if you promise not to use them anymore. And to train them with love instead of fear."

He gave me an odd look, and he was silent for a long moment. Finally, he said, "You're a very strange boy. Hasn't anyone taught you yet that promises aren't worth dust? That people never keep them?"

My stomach clenched. "Of course they have. I was on Outcast Island, remember?"

"Then why do you ask me to give you my promise?"

I gave it a second or two before I spoke again. "The only thing I can do is take your word for it."

He rolled his eyes. "You could do whatever you do with any dragon on this island, train it and ride it and fly away with it, and leave me behind. Do you know nothing about this world?"

"I know I could do that," I responded. "But I'm not going to. I'm going to show you that making dragons live in fear is no way to make them live. And you want to learn to ride, so I'm going to show you how."

7. Bonding

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 7: Bonding

****A/N:** I planned to write on this yesterday, but I went and saw HTTYD2 and JUST FREAKING YES I SAW IT AGAIN OH MY GOD *foams at the mouth* I NEED IT I NEED IT I forgot how much I loved it x3 I freaking need to talk about it with someone and I mostly discuss things on my ANs, so if you guys could tell me if you have or haven't seen it, so I know if it's okay to talk about it, would you do that? Also, what do you think of this chapter? ******

****Oh,** and I know a couple people wanted Valka to show up, but let me clear it up right now: Stoick's wife is definitely dead in this AU. She died in front of Stoick's eyes, the midwife's eyes and her son's eyes, although of course Hiccup was too young to remember. There is just no way to explain that away, and besides that, I have no desire

to. Valka was an okay person, not exactly the best mother, seeing as she left her son for twenty years, but okay. But in this AU, she would only slow the plot down.**

* * *

><p>Teaching people how to ride dragons was something I had never done before, but I vaguely recalled somebody once telling me that I was a good teacher. Can't remember their name or their face, of course, but I remember their compliment, because I'm egotistical like that.<p>

Anyway, back to the subject. I wasn't sure how good I was going to be at teaching this man how to ride a dragon, but that wasn't even the first step. The first step was finding the dragons and he said that they liked to gather at the watering hole. I noticed with relief that he'd sheathed his knife when we first set out, and seemed in no hurry to get it out again, but the closer and closer we drew, the more nervous he became. He drew out his knife again, beginning to play with it.

"You're gonna want to put that away," I warned him. "Dragons don't like weapons."

He nervously fingered it. "How about I just, ah, keep it out for a bit."

"How about you just, ah, don't?" I raised an eyebrow. "There's really nothing to fearâ€|?" I trailed off, waiting.

He didn't get it. "Really nothing to fearâ€|?"

"Well, it just occurred to me that I don't know your name, so I don't know what to call you."

"I don't know yours."

I had to smile, even if it was small. "Okay, fair enough. Since we don't know each other's names, we could try and start our first meeting over, and pretend there was no carnivorous garden, Outcasts or threats of bloody death by sword involved."

He offered a kind of anxious smile back. "Well, then, hello there. I'mâ€|I'm Eret." It seemed to take a great deal of effort to say his name, and it occurred to me that he probably didn't trust very easily, considering his burglar alarm and threats.

"I'm Hiccup." I tried not to show my own hesitancy at revealing my identity, hoping that a ready response would put him more at ease. "Andâ€"what is this?"

"Oh, the watering hole is underground," he tugged me into the dark, tight space and I shuddered, trying to pull my arm away.

"Um, I'm not really big on being underground, soâ€"

"Tough beans." Eret responded without an ounce of sympathy. "I'm not really big on fire-breathing lizards. C'mon."

I sucked in a breath, because I knew it would feel like I was trapped

in an airless room once I descended. I took a quick step downward, saying a silent goodbye to the sky until I could come back out again. I hated not being able to see the endless stretch of blue when I looked up.

As Eret led me farther into the darkness, I realized that it actually wasn't so bad down here. Once we got deeper in, the soft orange glow from a fire lit the space, and the cramped tunnel opened into a wide underground space, with dragons standing on the edge of the water, taking sips from the cool blue, or diving in for a swim. Scauldrons popped up from the water from time to time, shooting a spray at another dragon, but it of course didn't affect the dragons, being fire-breathers. A few of them even regarded it as a game, taking their own sips of water and spitting it at the Scauldrons.

A Thunderdrum raced up from the water with fish in his teeth, and he dropped the pile in front of a few Zipplebacks and Gronckles. I knew that a trait in many dragons was selfishness, but the kindness and generosity displayed here was like nothing I had ever seen. I couldn't help but smile, my heart swelling as I watched it. I didn't know any of these dragons, but I felt a strange connection with them as I scampered down, fearless.

Eret was not nearly as ease. He hovered at the mouth of the tunnel for a moment, and I honestly think he would have lingered there forever had I not given him a long look, making him edge out and into the open space.

He fingered his knife again, and I shot him a scowl, shaking my head. He reluctantly sheathed it.

"What do I do now?" He asked in a soft voice when he reached me.

"Well, it's not gonna be done quite the way that you do it," I told him, approaching a pale purple Nadder to emphasize this. "You don't just jump on his back and hope for the best. You have to bond with him first. Likeâ€¦like this!" I reached into my vest, before remembering I had not gathered any dragon nip, and wasn't even sure if this island grew any. I closed my vest again with a sigh and a shrug. Calming dragons was always easier with nip, but I didn't need it.

I slowed my steps the closer I drew to the dragon, who stared me down for a long second with intelligent yellow eyes, sizing me up.

"Hey, big guy," I whispered, staying in front of him at all times, letting him know I didn't plan on taking advantage of his blind spot. I reached under the chin, beginning to scratch him gently.

The dragon relaxed, sinking into my touch.

When I tore my eyes away to look at Eret, he looked astounded.

"Howâ€¦how are you doing that?" he whispered, edging nearer to me. There was something in his gaze when he looked at me and the dragonâ€¦ longing. As if he wanted to have whatever I had with the Nadder, even though this bond wasn't even formed yet, and was laughable to the one I had with Toothless.

I scratched the dragon as I spoke, moving from the chin onto the neck. "It'sâ€¦well, it'sâ€¦I can't explain it, really. You're just going to have to try it for yourself." I brought my hand higher, falling quiet as I touched the Nadder's nose. He purred deep in his throat, leaning into my touch.

"You're amazing," he whispered in awe.

"Anybody can do it," I shrugged, taking my hand off the Nadder's nose and beginning to pet his snout. He closed his eyes rapturously. "It's just, not a lot of people think to try."

Eret looked thoughtful.

"Here, you try!"

"What?!"

"Just give it a shot!"

"Is that how you teach people to ride dragons? Just touch their snout and then send your pupil off to try themselves?"

"Riding a dragon and bonding with one are two completely different things." I tried not to sound as insulted as I felt. "Look, I'm right here if you want some help, okay? I'm here."

He swallowed and took a breath before taking a step towards the Nadder.

"No sudden movements," I hissed. "You'll scare him."

"It's a him?"

I considered. "No idea. If you want to checkâ€¦"

"Nonono, if you say it's a boy, then he's a boy. I trust your judgement on this."

"That's a step in the right direction. No sudden moves, remember."

"Got that." He took another slow step closer.

"No sudden moves doesn't mean walk like you're ninety, it means just take it slow."

"Look, you do this how you want to do it, and let me do it how I want to do it, okay?"

"Whatever."

I watched in interest as he approached the Nadder at a snail's pace. "What do I do now?" he stage-whispered to me.

"Keep to the front. They have a blind spot, and they don't like people taking advantage of that, so keep to the front and make it clear you're not going to."

"Alright. Got it. Do I just touch his " its " nose now?"

I shrugged. "I'm not a walking, talking dragon manual. He should react better, considering I've already calmed him a bit, but if you have any dragon nip, that should work really well for a first time."

His brow knitted. "Dragon nip?"

"I thought you were some sort of expert on killing them," I responded. "Shouldn't you know what nip is?"

"I don't kill them, I just get them to collect treasure for me."

"Wait, wait, wait, is that how you got your treasure?"

"Yes! What, do you want my autobiography? Would that make things easier for you to grasp?"

I scowled. "No. That's not what I want. What do you do to make them collect it?"

"Despite what you think, I don't mistreat them."

"You didn't answer my question."

He huffed out a breath. "Telling you my name, and seeing you survive my garden does _not_ mean that I trust you."

"You do know by now that I don't give a whit for your treasure?"

"Why do you even care so much about the dragons?"

"Just bond with him." I gestured to the Nadder, who was looking between us a little suspiciously. "You'll understand, then."

8. Eret's Hideout

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 8: Eret's Hideout

**A/N: Or, the one where everybody shrugs and Eret and Hiccup have some friendly banter xD I guess I like this chapter, but the ending doesn't feel proper. Eh, well. Life's too short. Chapter 9 should be up soon! Thank you guys for all the reviews! **

**And I super wish we could all go see HTTYD2 together. Like, all of us. And I would gladly foot the bill x3 because I notice that a lot of you really wanted to go see it again. And you guys make my day just by checking out my story, so I wish I could take all of my readers and bring them to the theater with me. :-) **

* * *

><p>Watching Eret bond with the Nadder was at first gratifying and then increasingly painful when I remembered my own dragon, miles away from me on the island of Berk, stuck there with a potentially abusive chieftain. I could feel my smile disappearing off my face, even as Eret's slowly grew, becoming more genuine, and he relaxed his stiff position.<p>

"I've spent years with these dragons," he whispered, scratching the purple creature under the chin, just like I had, "and I never thought I'd get this close."

I shook my head. "We need to leave, as soon as we can."

"What?" Eret finally tore his eyes away from the dragon, looking at me questioningly.

"Leaving. That's what you wanted to do, right? We can't stay here forever."

"No," he admitted softly, looking back at the Nadder. "No, you're right, we can'tâ€|but I don't think we should leave yet."

"I don't want to wait any longer. I've been separated from my own dragon long enough."

"No. Wait." He grabbed at my sleeve before I could do anything, and though he was pretty brawny, he was stronger than he looked, and I didn't try to pull away. "Dragons normally travel in packs, right?"

"Not all of them. The Night Fury prefers solitudeâ€"

"But do the Nadders?"

"â€|Well, okay, they fly in packsâ€|"

"If just one single Nadder flies around and off the island before the others do as well, the Outcasts are probably going to know it's you, especially considering that training dragons is what they locked you up for to begin with. They'll be after you so fast that you won't even know it. I don't think it's a good idea for us to leave yet."

I could see the sense in what he was saying, much as I didn't want to. I looked at the Nadder again, feeling once more that painful longing for Toothless. "Well, if the Outcasts just decide to set up camp hereâ€|"

"They're looking for you, didn't you say that?"

I nodded reluctantly.

"Won't they just assume you've found a quieter, less noticeable way off this island, and try to find you again?"

"Maybe," I admitted sourly.

He released his grip on my tunic. "So, as I was saying, they're probably gonna be gone by tomorrow morning. I think it'd be best if

we stayed overnight."

I glared reluctantly at the floor. "I don't like it. I want to leave."

"But if you leave, Hiccup, you'll be waving a neon sign in their faces, just daring them to track you. Believe me, they'll probably take you up on that offer."

"I'd think you'd be eager to leave, too, considering you've wanted to for how long now?"

"I'm not like you. I've waited. I can wait one more night."

So, this is what led to us crashing through the forest, and by now the sun was setting and a kind of cold breeze had sprung up, biting at my skin even through my fabric. "Do you even know where we are?"

"I know this forest like the back of my hand, Hiccup," he responded easily. "Don't fret, I know exactly where we are."

"No, you don't. We passed by that tree an hour ago. And where are you even taking me?"

He stepped out into a clearing, revealing his garden once more. His carnivorous garden.

I swallowed. "Is there another way?"

"Nope!" he said cheerfully, as the Nadder skidded to a stop behind me, giving me a gentle push forward. "And, like I said, you have nothing to fear, anyway. If it left you alone once, I'm pretty sure it'll leave you alone twice."

"Pretty sure. How satisfying," I grumbled. "And have you even thought about him?" I flung out an arm to indicate the dragon. "Will it eat him?"

"It reads the minds and hearts of humans, not dragons. C'mon."

"Shouldn't it read the minds of all species?"

"Look, this wasn't a customized garden, okay? I got here, I found out there was a man-eating garden, and I did what I could with what I got." He entered the clearing fearlessly, tugging me along behind him. The Nadder flew over the clearing, flying low so as not to alert Alvin and the Outcasts.

"Wait, so you didn't plant this garden?"

"When I first washed up here, what use would I have had for a garden like this? Now, I actually have something to protect."

"Why did you make a home here? Why didn't you try to find your way back to your island?"

"I'm not a Viking, Hiccup," he said brusquely. "I don't belong to an island. I'm a Wanderer."

I tried not to look so surprised, but I think I failed when I said, "Oh."

He hauled me along the final stretch of bright green grass, and down through the dark path where he'd cornered and threatened me. "You don't sound very happy."

"I thought Vikings and Wanderers had this age-old feud."

"Your people enslaved mine."

"Oh. I'm sorry about that."

Eret shrugged. "I wasn't concerned when I realized you were a Viking. I could take you."

"Why does nobody ever regard me as a threat? I could be as muscled and tough as any hardcore Viking. What if I just choose not to be?"

"Don't make me laugh," he responded, stepping easily in between two trees. "Right. Here we are! The place I call my own." He gestured grandly to a wizened old tree, bent and twisted and completely out of shape.

"Impressive. You sleep in a tree?"

"Not in the branches, idiot. Hold on." He walked forward, towards the tree and, next second, I was blinking to make sure my eyes weren't playing tricks on me. He had leaned forward and opened up the tree trunk without even hesitating. It swung open like a tiny door and I drew back with a gasp.

"How did you _do_ that?"

"I'm a Wanderer, like I said," he shrugged, but pride was evident in his voice. "I can make a home anywhere."

Eret opened the door wide enough to slip inside, gesturing for me and the Nadder to follow.

"No wonder you warmed to him so fast," I said, giving the Nadder an affectionate pat on the nose. "Don't Wanderers have no fear or something like that?"

"The hearts of polar bears," he corrected instantly, shutting the door behind me and crossing the tiny room to the hearth.

There was a door thrown wide on the other end of the room and a glint of gold caught my eye. When I looked in, I gasped. That surely must have been his treasure, thick gold coins and plates and cups and bright jewels, red and purple and every color imaginable. The sparkle they gave off was beautifully entrancing, but I suddenly understood why the garden had not claimed me: I felt no desire for the treasure. I noticed there was a heavy black key in the door's dirty lock, and I shut the door and turned the key until the lock clicked.

He looked up at the sound, but he didn't try to stop me. "You found the treasure, huh?"

"I thought you said just because you told me your name didn't mean you trusted me," I replied, tossing him the key.

He caught it without even looking up. "Shut up, kid."

"Just saying, letting somebody near your treasure is kind of careless."

"Listen, just because the garden didn't eat you doesn't mean I won't kill you still if you don't stop talking."

The Nadder took pity on Eret's weak attempts to start a fire and blasted one into the hearth, making him jump back in surprise before giving the dragon a grateful smile and a stroke.

"I don't think you'll kill me."

"Try me."

"If you were going to, you would have had your knife out by now."

"Maybe I'm going to kill you in your sleep."

"Doubtful. I have trouble sleeping, anyway, so I could outlast you."

"I would love to see you try, Mr. Hardcore Viking."

"I am a hardcore Viking."

"Mm-hm."

"You don't sound convinced."

"I'm not. You're half my size."

"Three-fourths."

"One-fourth."

"That, mister, was uncalled for in the extreme."

"But it was true," he pointed out with a shrug.

"I disagree."

Eret rolled his eyes at me. "Are you hungry?"

I shrugged. "Bit."

"Well, stop making nasty comments and I'll give you something to eat."

"Oh, how nice!"

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 9: Trust Me

****A/N:** So, I'm really tired and kinda down, but THANK YOU FOR ALL THE REVIEWS ON UNTOLD LIKE OH MY GOSH REALLY WHYYYY :DDD THANK YOU SO MUCH I WILL WRITE CHAPTER 83 SOON ******

****P.S:** Also, I'm writing a new HTTYD modern AU, 'Hard Knocks'. It should come with many Hiccup/Stoick feels, if you want to read it x3******

* * *

><p>"You'd better try and get some sleep," Eret told me once we had finished eating. He tossed a couple thick quilts at me and grabbed a couple up for himself. "I expect the Outcasts will be gone tomorrow morning."<p>

I nodded, my eyes straying to the Nadder once again as I thought of Toothless. I had to admit that staying here made more sense than charging off, but I couldn't help it, I just wanted to get back to my dragon as fast as possible.

Eret glanced curiously over at me as he picked up a wooden bucket filled with water to douse the fire. "You okay? You look like you're a million miles away."

I tried to shrug it off. "Yeah. Just miss Toothless, I guess."

I heard the bucket clunk onto the floor and I turned to see water spilling out of it, but Eret hardly seemed to care; he did nothing but stare at me for a full five minutes before finally managing to rasp out, "Is Toothless your dragon?"

I nodded uncertainly.

"Is he really toothless?"

"Erâ€|no," I admitted. "He's just got retractable teeth, which was whyâ€|"

Eret slumped against the wall, completely disregarding the water pooling up in front of him. "Your dragon is called _Toothless_, and he's got _retractable teeth_?"

"I know it's kind of weird," I shrugged, "but the nickname sort of stuck, andâ€|"

"You're it," he whispered, head now in his hands.

"What?" I leaned closer to him, crawling out of my nest of blankets.

He raised his head to look at me, and I was startled to see that

there were tears in his eyes. "You're it. You're it. You've got the fang-free dragon! Butâ€¦I never expected it to be somebody like youâ€¦" he eyed my embarrassingly skinny physique. "I dunno, I guess they just described you like such a great Heroâ€¦"

"Who did? Eret, _what are you talking about_?"

The sound of his own name seemed to jar Eret, because he blinked a couple times, banishing the tears before swallowing. "You don't know? Nobodyâ€¦nobody ever told you what you wereâ€¦?"

I shook my head cautiously. "Alvin isn't exactly the warm and fuzzy type who answers all your questions."

"You can say that again," he muttered bitterly, before raising his voice a bit. "I just can't believe you don't know, I meanâ€¦if it had been me, I would have found out everything I couldâ€¦Iâ€¦I guessâ€¦" he looked at the fire for a second, seemingly mesmerized by the dancing flames. "Well, years and years ago, there was a prophecy. The Wanderers are, above all, known for being amazing Soothsayers. I come from a long line, in fact." He seemed very proud of this fact before adding reluctantly, "I think the gift skipped a generation, though, I have no seer abilities at allâ€¦anyway, years ago, Grimbeard the Ghastly made a prophecy. It was known all over the Archipelago, but every Soothsayer who heard it copied it down, and remembered it, repeating it to their children, making them learn the story by heart so they might one day identify the true subject of the prophecy when they saw him. The Vikings, over time, rejected the prophecy, claiming it was nothing but lies, but the Wanderers and Soothsayers memorized it."

Eret looked at me pointedly for a long moment before continuing. "And well, the prophecyâ€¦it went like this:

"_The Dragontime is coming,_"

And only a King can save you now.

This King shall be,"

The Champion of Champions.

You shall know the King,"

_By the King's Lost Things. _

A fang-free dragon, my second-best sword,"

An arrow-from-the-land-that-does-not-exist,"

The heart's stone, the key-that-opens-all-locks,"

_The ticking-thing, the Throne, the Crown, _

And last and best of all the ten,"

_The Dragon Jewel will save all men." _

Eret finished flawlessly and stared at me for a long second, obviously waiting for me to get it.

It took a few minutes before I did. "Butâ€¦I'mâ€¦I'm not the King."

"If you have the Lost Things, you are!"

"But I don't have any of those!"

"You have the fang-free dragon, don't you?"

"Retractable teeth," I corrected instantly, but this didn't stop Eret.

"The second-best sword, right?"

"I don't own a sword at all," I responded.

"A Roman shield?"

I shook my head.

A touch of desperation entered Eret's golden eyes. "An arrow from the land that does not exist?"

I started to shake, but then I thought for a second. "Well, I mean, I did have this arrow once, back when I became convinced that I could learn archeryâ€¦and, well, I heard tell that it was supposedly from America, butâ€¦I mean, I have no idea if it was, obviously. And besides, Alvin took it away from me."

Eret jumped to his feet, his excitement rekindled. "The heart's stone?"

My mind jumped to the dragon bracelet in my vest, with the heart-shaped ruby set in the eye. "I don't knowâ€¦" I pulled it out and handed it to him for examination.

He let out a yell of delight. "This is it! Do you have the key, the key that opens all locks?"

"Iâ€¦I did have a key once," I admitted. "And I was told that it could open any lock, any lock in the world, no matter how difficult it was, but again, Alvin took it."

"And the ticking-thing?"

I hesitated. I really didn't want to give Eret false hope, but I nodded. "I escaped once to Hysteric Isle, and wound up with this compass kind of thing that kept ticking like a clock, only it wasn't a clock or a compass, because it had a needle that pointed east when I got it, and north when I got back to Outcast Island and then west when I escapedâ€¦Alvin took that, too."

"A Throne?" Eret's face was flushed, and his golden eyes were sparkling now.

I shook my head wordlessly.

"The Crown?" He tilted his head hopefully.

I shook again.

"The Jewel?"

"Nope."

He sighed.

"I told you, I'm not the King."

"If you have the King's Lost Thingsâ€"

"But I don't. I found all of those things by accident, I wasn't even looking for them! I mean, I was mad when Alvin took them, mostly because they weren't his, butâ€"

"Alvin the Treacherous took them?" His eyes went wide with yet another completely insane realization. "He stole them from you?!"

I nodded. "He has no respect for other people's property, that's for sure."

Eret disregarded this, knelt down next to me, grabbed me by the shoulders and physically shook me back and forth. "That's it! Alvin the Treacherous has always wanted to be King, ever since he heard the prophecy! He was said to be one of the few Vikings who still believed in itâ€| don't you see? He's only gone and burgled all the Lost Things off of you!"

I stared at him for a long moment, completely lost for words. And then I eased his hands off my shoulders, patting his wrist consolingly. "No, he hasn't."

Eret was too excited to be annoyed with me. "He stole your arrow and your key, oh, it's a wonder he didn't get your stone or your dragon yetâ€|and thank Thor the Dragon Jewel remains unfoundâ€|"

"Eret, you need to stop," I held out a hand in a stopping motion. "I'm not a King, okay? I'm hardly even a Viking. You need to stop thinking that I am!"

"Why can't you see it?" he demanded desperately. "Don't you get it? I've been a Wanderer all my life, and that's just asking to be put into slavery! It's said that this King is going to abolish slavery forever from the lands, and that nobody will ever be put through the brutal practice again. Not ever. And youâ€|you're the one who's going to stop that! Many of my people are still in slaveryâ€|I tried to help them escape, butâ€| His face crumpled, and I had the feeling that this story did not have a happy ending.

"When I tried helping them out, I only got them in worse trouble than before," he explained miserably. "Every single one of them was killed, murdered by their masters for trying to escape, or else beaten into submission. I kept trying to right the awful wrongs I had committed, but too late â€" nobody wanted anything to do with me afterward. Those who had survived didn't."

I gaped at him, unable to speak.

He lifted hard golden eyes to mine. "That's why I kept believing in

you, and that's why I believe that you could be the King. Because I believe that my people will one day be freed. And maybe one day, I can make it up to them." I knew from experience how hard it was to hold back tears when you were frightened or upset, and he was doing an admirable job. He turned his head away, facing the crackling fire.

"Eret, Iâ€¦I'm sorry," I whispered into the silence. "I never knew that about you, butâ€¦I'm not the King you're looking for. I can't free anyone from slavery, I can't even free myself from Alvin. It's all I can do to keep running and hiding, honestly."

Eret pretended to be inspecting his sleeve, but I knew he was drying his eyes, and I pretended not to notice.

"We need to get those Lost Things back from Alvin," he spoke in a determined voice, yet it trembled slightly.

"I don't think I'm King," I reminded him gently, because I didn't want to upset him anymore.

"The Outcasts have probably set up camp somewhere on the beach," he continued in a slightly stronger voice, ignoring me completely. "C'mon, Hiccup."

"This is crazy," I muttered, rising to my feet and dusting myself off. "Why on earth should I do this?"

"Because you're the true King, and I know it, and I know that you think you're an unlikely candidate, I mean, honestly, look at the size of you. You're one-fourth my size, as I said before, but can you imagine the look on Alvin's face when we get the Lost Things?"

"But what if they aren't the Lost Things? What if they're just a weird compass, a bent arrow and a rusty key?"

"Listen, I know they are. You might not, but I do. Can you just trust me?"

10. Search and Rescue

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 10: Search and Rescue

A/N: Ummmm yeah. People will probably be impatient for Hiccup to leave and get back to Berk, but right now, he can't, as you'll see. I decided this had to happen. Good day to you all. Thank you for the reviews.

* * *

><p>Eret didn't want to wait to go get the supposed Lost Things â€" he barely wanted to slow down and flesh out a plan. I could tell he was more action than talk, surviving more by luck and thinking on his

feet than anything else. He was already halfway to the door of the hideout with his knife unsheathed when I called him back.<p>

The purple Nadder wanted to go with us, but he might have accidentally stepped on someone and woken a few Outcasts, so we had to tell him to stay behind. "We'll be fine," I patted the creature's nose reassuringly for a bit before dropping my hand and turning to Eret. "Be that as it may, this is still a crazy idea."

"You don't have to come with," he replied with a shrug. "It'll be easy enough to grab the Lost Things, stick a sword through him and go running."

"Wait, you're going to _kill_ him?"

"Isn't that what you want?"

I was a Viking, and I should have been able to laugh at the idea of my enemy's death, but instead, I shuddered a little. "No, thank you!"

"But it'd be so easy," he protested.

"But how could you live if you'd killed someone?" The instant I asked it, I knew I'd said the wrong thing.

Eret's golden eyes darkened. I hadn't realized how cheerful he had looked to me after befriending the Nadder, but the difference between then and now was striking. "You're, what, thirteen? Fourteen? You're a Viking, and you haven't killed anyone yet?"

"I'm fifteen," I corrected instantly. "Orâ€|maybe sixteen, I don't remember."

"How can you not remember your own age?"

"Uhhâ€|long story." I didn't really feel like getting into that tonight. As if Eret needed another excuse to go whack people while they slept. "But the point is, I don't want you killing Alvin. Or any of the Outcasts, really. I'm sure that the supposed Lost Things are just stupid knickknacks that Alvin took from me, to like, I don't know, exert his will, I guess. So, why don't we just slow down and forget about this whole thing?"

Eret paused for a moment, throwing a glance towards the door of the hideout. "I can't," he admitted softly, with a heavy sigh. "I have to know if you're the real deal. And yeah, now that I think about it, it'd probably be best if you come with, otherwise I won't recognize the Things on my own."

"I'm not the real deal, though," I protested, following him over to the door of the hideout and giving it a push. The tree trunk door swung open without a sound.

Eret looked very surprised. "You're coming?"

I shrugged. "I think it's pretty clear that I can't stop you, so let's just get this whole crazy thing over with and I'll prove to you that I'm not what you're looking for."

* * *

><p>The Outcast camp was almost completely dark and quiet. There were a few glowing, smoldering embers of a dying fire, and the man who was supposed to be on watch was snoring softly, sprawled out on the ground, making our job so much the easier. Almost too easy, in fact.<p>

The thought made me uneasy, but it only spurred Eret on to higher spirits as he maneuvered, light-footed, around several snoozing Outcasts before finally kneeling down next to the sleeping figure of Alvin the Treacherous. I looked down on the scarred face that had caused me so much fear and pain for fifteen to sixteen years, and I wondered what it would have been like had I told Eret to go ahead. To do it. To kill him. To take away a life. I wondered what would have happened had I given him an okay. What would this man's last dream entail? What would his thoughts be when he felt the metal piercing his flesh, his bones, his heart? When warm, scarlet blood poured from his chest onto the gritty, pebbly beach he slept on, what would he be thinking?

I swallowed, trying to turn my attention away from those thoughts. The idea of Alvin never hurting me again, never hunting me again—it was beautiful, but impossible. It was the kind of fantasy I couldn't even allow myself to dream of, it was so wonderful. It was too good to be true, and it hurt to even think about it. And yet—

I had been seconds away from having it. All it would have taken was one word, four letters, and Eret would have done it. He wanted to. The idea appealed to him. He wouldn't have felt a bit guilty. But would I?

I knelt down beside Eret, and I watched the Outcast chieftain breathing deeply and evenly, in and out, as Eret searched tirelessly for a quiver. All it would have taken was one word. One word, and I could have been free forever, never to worry about Alvin again. I could have gone back to Berk immediately, and reunited with Toothless and met my real father, and found out if he was a good one or not. And if he was a good one, I would never have had to run again. I would have had a shot at family, a shot at being ordinary.

All it would have taken was one word. So why had my first instinct been to say no?

When Eret found no quiver, he threw me an exasperated look. "Where is it?" he breathed, hardly even whispering, more like mouthing the words.

"Oh. He doesn't do archery. He says it's for the weak. I guess he wouldn't use the arrow, then."

Eret rolled his eyes before turning his attention back to Alvin, looking for the other two Things. He pulled out a compass, but it wasn't ticking and it didn't have a needle that kept spinning in different directions. He then pulled out a rusty ring of keys, but I shook my head on those. Alvin had never put my key with his others; he'd kept mine separate.

Eret was disappointed that we hadn't managed to find the Lost Things, but he made no other offers to take Alvin's life, and for that, I was

very glad. I started for the thick canopy of trees with him, but one of the Outcasts suddenly flew upward with a yell, startling nearly everyone out of sleep. Alvin flew upward, grabbing his sword in his right hand and his mace in his left, swinging both about wildly and clocking Dundle, who swung a fist at Alvin before realizing he had just punched his chieftain. Pandemonium ensued, and for a second, Eret and I thought we could make it. But one of the Outcasts staggered into the bushes to relieve himself, and the white-haired woman awoke shouting nonsense words that gave me an odd feeling. I assumed they must have been more spells. The Outcast saw us and let out a yell. Alvin looked up from clobbering Dundle and grabbed his sword up again, his eyes gleaming with savage excitement.

I was frozen with fear for a few seconds, unable to do anything, even breathe. I could feel Eret's hand on my back, pushing me, and his voice shouting, "Go, go, go!"

I finally came back to myself after he said this, which was lucky because Alvin had just grabbed my arm and I managed to yank it away and run before he'd gotten a good grip. I could hear Eret's pounding footsteps and panting from a few paces behind me, but I didn't stop to turn around or look. The charming garden was just up ahead, but as it turned out, it wasn't necessary to even cross; the purple Nadder must have sensed we were in distress, because he came shooting out of the trees, flipping us onto his back and up into the air.

I had had some experience, thanks to Toothless, of clinging onto a dragon's neck for dear life, but Eret lost grip and went tumbling down, hitting the forest floor with a loud, worrying thump. We were only about ten feet up, but it was still high enough to cause a broken bone or two, and I winced. The Nadder plunged down again as Outcasts began to crowd Eret's still body. I heard something snap, but it wasn't me or Eret, which was lucky; the pain in my shoulder wasn't something I ever wanted to experience again. In fact, it throbbed just from hearing another person's pain.

But when the Nadder rose up again, I realized that it wasn't a human who had gotten hurt. One of the dragon's wings was limp and twisted, and I knew from experience that the creature would not be able to stay in the air for long. Eret didn't know any of this yet; he was clinging madly to the dragon's talons, which he needn't have done; the Nadder was clutching him tightly enough so that he wouldn't fall. We were three feet from the hideout when the dragon finally collapsed, and Eret crawled feebly out from under it, coughing. The rough landing jarred my shoulder again, but I pushed the pain away, scrambling off the Nadder's back and studying the poor creature.

"What's wrong?" Eret looked up at me, concern in his eyes.

"He's hurt," I bent down next to the Nadder, running a hand along the wing.

Eret spotted the broken wing, too, and gasped.

"It's okay, it's a clean break. We'll just have to wrap it, in a splint, I think. Human treatments work just as well for dragons, we just have to do them on a larger scale."

Eret nodded, looking pale and kind of sick.

"Do you have any medical supplies in your hideout?"

Another weak nod.

"Then go get them." I turned back to the Nadder, stroking his glistening purple head. "You'll be okay. We'll get you all fixed up, and you'll be okay."

11. Scars

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 11: Scars

A/N: The one where Hiccup is OOC and there's tons of swearing. Hmph. I'm not so sure about this chapter, guys. Two updates in one day, though. Thanks for the reviews.

* * *

><p>We managed to get the Nadder back in the hideout and fashion the dragon a makeshift splint, but even after all the excitement was over, neither of us could sleep that well. We sat up in our blankets until late into the night, discussing the Lost Things and the King, who was supposedly to rule over every tribe, every island, every human and dragon in the Barbaric Archipelago.<p>

"No wonder Alvin wants that position," I mumbled, more to myself than to Eret. "I guess chief isn't good enough for him anymore."

Eret made a face in the darkness. "Sounds like him." He patted the Nadder's good wing reassuringly as the dragon rolled over to face us. "But don't worry," he added consolingly to the creature. "Nothing's gonna happen to _you_."

It was odd to see a man who was previously so afraid of dragons now afraid _for _the dragon.

I stood from my spot on the floor, staring out into the starlit night. "We need to leave, as soon as that wing heals up. We can't stay here forever, not now that Alvin knows where we are."

"I bet you anything he's got the garden surrounded," Eret murmured. "If we try to leave at all, he'll have us in moments, does he know that this dragon is hurt?" He indicated the Nadder beside him.

I walked over to the dragon, rubbing his nose. "I don't know. I can't remember if he was near enough to see â€" I think I was more focused on surviving than remembering every little detail." I sighed at how sharp I sounded when I spoke. "But we need to go. I wish we could have just left tonight, instead of going on some crazy search for some supposedly ancient and foretold things." I threw the man an annoyed look.

He shrugged in apology. "Least now we know. So, we take off once this guy's wing is healed up, and we go to Outcast Island to find the Things, then?"

"No," I growled. "I've had quite enough of your wild goose chases, Eret. I'm getting on the dragon's back, and I'm going _home_."

"What?" Eret asked in surprise. "But, Hiccup, if you don't challenge Alvin for the Thingsâ€"

"I've had enough of your _stupid_ claims that I'm the King! I've never even heard of such a stupid fairy tale before, you're probably making it up to trick me, to see what an idiot I am! Well, I'm not falling for it! Isn't it clear enough that I'm nowhere near a King? I'm not going to end slavery, I'm not going to rule the Archipelago, I'm not going to do anything amazing, I'm going to be running from Alvin my whole life and just trying to _survive_! I don't want to be King, I don't want to challenge Alvin, I just want my dragon back and to find out whether my father _really_ is abusive or not, and I want to just think about everything and get used to Humongous being gone, and I want you to leave me alone about being King! Hell, how am I supposed to be a King if I can't even be a _chief_?"

I didn't realize what I was saying, or how loudly I was yelling, until my tirade was over. But pent-up anger and frustration and sadness was spilling out of me by the bucketful, and I didn't have the strength to stop it. I drew in several deep breaths, looking away from Eret, staring determinedly at the floor, waiting for him to kick me out, to say he was done protecting me. Everybody always said goodbye to me in the end. I swallowed, and the action was audible in the thick, tense silence.

Eret drew his own, rather deep breath. "I'm sorry," he said, surprisingly calmly, and when I glanced up, I was relieved to see that he didn't look angry. "I guess I didn't really think about things from your point of view. I was overeager, I think, in finding out that you're the Kingâ€|your destiny isn't written in a prophecy, and only you control it, sometimes helped or hindered by Fate and the gods."

I brushed my hair impatiently out of my eyes, still staring stubbornly at the ground. "Yeah, but mostly I've been hindered," I mumbled in response.

He laughed lightly, but it sounded forced. "So, what did you mean by, 'whether my father really is abusive or not'?"

"That's a long story," I sank back down into the blankets, staring out at the stars, shining so bright and silvery above me. I wanted nothing more right then than to disappear up into that navy blue sky forever, floating up there with the stars, completely at peace, maybe even shining a bit, like the rest of them. Dimmer than the others, oh, so much dimmer, but still shining. And free. Away from Alvin. I'd never have to worry about him again. I let my head fall back against the pillow, wincing as I jostled my shoulder with the movement.

"Are you alright?" Eret asked, clearly jumping on anything to dispel the remaining awkwardness. "You look like you're in pain."

I started to shrug, but that kind of hurt, too. "I think I might have fractured my shoulder or something, no big deal."

He raised an eyebrow. "No big deal? You do realize that if you don't give yourself the proper medical attentionâ€"

"I don't want any medical attention," I snapped. "I want to get off this damn island and back to my dragon."

"I'm just saying, you don't want to meet up with your dragon while you're half-dead and barely able to function," he pointed out. "Please let me help you."

I sat up in frustration. "Do whatever, I guess. I can't stop you."

Eret seemed a bit more subdued since I'd yelled at him, but I didn't have it in me to feel guilty anymore. He gently knelt next to me, taking my arm in one hand. I winced when his fingers went to my shoulder.

"Yeah, see, that's a bad sign," he remarked. He applied a bit of pressure to the shoulder. "Does that hurt?"
>I smacked his hand away. "What kind of question is that?"<p>

"I think we're gonna need to make you a sling to keep the arm still. Can you move it?"

I nodded.

"Good, that suggests it isn't broken. All the same, I'm gonna need you to take off your shirt." He pulled out the wooden box of medical supplies again, hardly even noticing when I glared at him.

"No thank you," I seethed.

"Hiccupâ€|" He sighed. "Look, I'm only trying to help you right now. I understand that you're angry with me for trying to force the position of King onto you, but don't let that anger become pride, and don't let it stop you from letting me help you."

"I don't want to take off my shirt in front of you!"

"You're acting like it's a full strip," he rolled his eyes, not comprehending. "I already know you're a matchstick, that's obvious even with your clothes still on."

"That's not what I meant," I responded coldly. "I don't want you toâ€|see things, okay?"

Eret raised a questioning eyebrow. "I'm only trying to help. I promise, whatever you're talking about, I won't comment on it, okay?"

I glanced down at myself for a long moment, and then I sighed. I shrugged off the vest with one shoulder, pulling it off one-handed, because Eret gave me kind of a stern look when I tried to use my bad shoulder. I let the vest fall onto the floor and set about unlacing the shirt, pulling it up over my head. Eret didn't gasp when he saw the scars; it was like they barely even registered. He just looked at

them for a second. "Is that what you didn't want me to see?"

I nodded reluctantly.

He actually laughed. "Really? You think you can scare me off with a few scars?" he pulled up his own shirt, revealing whip marks covering his sides. They were clearly old, scarred over by now and nearly forgotten by all but him. He let his shirt drop again after I'd studied the scars for a second, and then he opened his box of medical supplies. "Why didn't you mention being injured before this?"

"Probably because your charming way of welcoming guests turned me off to it," I responded as he began to fashion a sling.

12. Vivid

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 12: Vivid

****A/N:** This chapter is dedicated to my amazing friend and artist, RazzlePazzleDooDot. She's having a rough day, and I'm posting this newest chapter in the hopes of distracting her from her problems right now. Thank you all for the reviews, each one reminds me that my writing matters. ******

* * *

><p>I had always had vivid dreams. I was never sure why they scared me at first, but at around ten or eleven years old, I began realizing that every dream I had seemed to come true. Whatever I saw when I closed my eyes in the night was reality the next morning, or the morning after that, or the morning after that. I had learned to be cautious with dreams, even though Alvin had told me that real Vikings never put much stock into their nighttime imaginings like I did.<p>

I think there was only one dream I honestly resisted believing, because it was just so terrible. I was about twelve at the time, and it was the night before I planned to show everybody that dragons were good, and that they attacked because they had to. I remembered laying down to sleep that night, and praying to Thor that he would give me a hint about how the next day's events would go. The only vision I got for my trouble was Alvin sneering down at me, picking me up by my collar and tossing me onto a cold, hard stone floor. I bolted up from the dirty ground, trying in vain to grab onto him before he left, but the door closed behind him with awful finality, and I realized I was in a cell. I'd woken up in the night, shortly after that dream, in a cold sweat and trying my hardest not to cry, because Vikings didn't cry. And then I reminded myself that Vikings didn't believe in their dreams becoming real, either, so I'd rolled over and tried to make myself go back to sleep.

It was clear that that wasn't going to work this time, because when

Eret had finally fashioned the sling to his liking, and fastened it on me, helped me pull my shirt on and settled me back down into the thick nest of blankets, I fell asleep almost instantly. I had thought, the whole time he'd been bandaging my arm, that I wouldn't be able to so much as close my eyes for a second, but all the turmoil and exhaustion just welled up and I couldn't even keep my eyes open.

I was standing on an island, a very tiny island, surrounded by nothing but ocean. Alvin the Treacherous stood on one side, and an old man with a very long white beard dragging in the sand behind him stood on the other. Alvin had Toothless in a tiny cage beside him, and he was smirking down at me as my blood boiled upon seeing my dragon so cruelly mistreated and defenseless. When Alvin moved his head a bit, to look at the white-haired woman bowing reverently to him, I caught a flash of gold and realized a Crown was perched atop his head. An ancient, aged wooden throne stood behind him on the beach, and I could see my key in his hand. My arrow in his quiver. My compass tied carefully to his wrist, ticking incessantly. The golden dragon bracelet that the dragon had stolen from Humongous was wound around his wrist, and I felt another flash of white-hot anger. Alvin didn't deserve to wear anything that had once been Humongous'. A very rusty, very old sword was wedged in Alvin's belt, and he clutched a sparkling, bright red jewel in his hand.

"I know that jewel," I mumbled frantically, knowing that something terrible was going to happen if Alvin held the Jewel up to the light of the rising sun.

The old man walked slowly forward, and he reached in between the bars of Toothless' cage, running his fingers along the dragon's shining black scales. Toothless, who had previously had his teeth bared menacingly, relaxed visibly under the older man's touch. It was then that I realized that the old man was wearing a blindfold, so he couldn't even see Toothless. The old man took his hand away from my dragon and walked blindly, slowly towards Alvin, touching the golden crown upon his head, the key in his hand, the sword in his belt. The last thing he touched was the Jewel, and when he did, he smiled. The smile that broke out over his face was heart-wrenchingly happy, because I had the feeling that this man rarely smiled. He threw his hands up in the air, palms up, yelling joyously at the heavens. "We have found the King of the Wilderwest, who comes with the King's Lost Things!"

The white-haired woman let out a cracked, slightly mad laugh and Alvin smiled grimly, kneeling down next to her, at the old man's feet. "Crown me."

The old man gently took the Crown off his head, throwing it into the sand. Alvin seemed surprised by this. "You cannot be Crowned King yet," the man intoned sternly. "You may only be Crowned on the Thirteenth Day of the Yule. You know this. It is the Twelfth Day of Yule. You will ride back in your boat and tomorrow, you will come sailing back here with your Lost Things once more, and only then may you be Crowned King over the entirety of the Barbaric Archipelago."

Alvin looked ready to hit the man above him, but he forced a small smile. "Forgive me," he whispered, in a voice so deadly that I felt like running and screaming in the opposite direction, but the old man

didn't even flinch. "I forgot myself in my excitement. I'll be back tomorrow, and that is a promise."

"No," I mumbled feverishly. "Those Lost Things aren't real! You can't Crown him, those Lost Things aren't real!"

The old man looked sternly down at me. Even with a blindfold on, I could still tell that he was gearing up for a scolding. "Child, hush now. I have gone through many imposters, and many false Lost Things in my time. These are the real ones, and you must know this."

"But they're not!" I stammered. "Eret's just crazy, he doesn't know what he's talking about! You have to believe me!"

"I don't believe you," the man interrupted calmly. "I know what the true Lost Things are. These are it. Do not trouble yourself, child."

The white-haired woman cackled again, sounding even madder this time. "You should have thought about this before saying you wouldn't challenge my son for the Things!"

"But I don't want to be King!" I cried in frustration. "I just want to be _normal_!"

"Hiccup," the old man said gently, "wake up."

"What are you talking about?" I demanded. "I'm awake!"

"Wake up!"

I opened my eyes and drew in several deep breaths, as if I had just been underwater for a long period of time. I sat upright, realizing that Eret had been shaking my shoulder. I looked around the hideout for a second; dawn was finally starting to break.

"So!" Eret drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly. "I don't know what I'm talking about?"

"What?"

"You were talking in your sleep, and that's what you said."

My face grew warm. "Sorry. I was just having kind of an odd dream."

"Must have been a really odd one, you kept talking about Alvin and being King and the Lost Things."

"Your story really stuck with me," I shrugged, pretending to be playing with the hem of my vest until he had scooted a bit farther away. The moment I thought he couldn't see, I ripped open my vest and dug around inside the brown belt, searching for searching!

My fingers found cool gold and I pulled it out, sighing with relief. The golden dragon bracelet from my dream was still here, solidly next to me. I knew I should have gone back to Humongous' body, if the tide hadn't carried him out by now, and left the bracelet with him, but I had an odd feeling about it. I had the feeling that if I left it lying around, Alvin would be sure to take it.

I sank back down onto the pillows, feeling too overwhelmed to think. "Is it really morning already?"

"Yep," Eret responded cheerfully. "You can go back to sleep, though, if you like. We'll be having mostly a quiet day here while we wait for his wing to heal back up."

I grumbled, mostly to myself. "I wish I could just go now. I want to see Toothless again."

Eret sighed. "Look, I know you miss him, but right now, this hideout is probably the safest place for you. We'll leave, but we have to wait, okay? His wing is still healing."

"I know," I admitted before glancing over at Eret and realizing he was sitting beside the cold, dark hearth once more, and his makeshift bed looked untouched. "Did you get any sleep at all?"

He shook his head. "Too wired. I'll sleep. On a day like this, we can afford to get our days and nights mixed up."

I glanced over at the Nadder again with a sigh. He was still asleep. I knew I should have been more sympathetic about his wing, but I couldn't help it; I wanted to leave as soon as possible.

13. Rightness

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 13: Rightness

**A/N: Yeah. So...yeah. I hope you enjoy this. It seemed to take forever to get to this point, huh? Thanks for pushing me over 100 reviews :D **

* * *

><p>As the week wore on, the Nadder's wing healed up wonderfully, and Eret said no more about Kings, or Lost Things, or any of that stuff that I could really do without right now. I was grateful that he had dropped the subject, but I couldn't help feeling slightly guilty, too, knowing it was my outburst that had made him keep his mouth shut for so long.<p>

But finally, the night came to drive everything but getting to Berk clear out of my mind. I had been cooped up in the hideout for far too long and had deemed it suitable to go for a walk before I went completely crazy from cabin fever, and when I entered the hideout again, I saw Eret packing a small, woven basket. I leaned against the door as I shut it. "The Outcasts are out there."

"They didn't see you coming in, did they?" He glanced up, alarmed.

"No, but I saw them." I plunked myself down on the floor a few feet away from him, sitting Indian-style across from him. "That woman â€" the witch â€" she's trying to figure out a way to dismantle the garden magically."

"She won't be able to do it," Eret responded confidently, throwing a thick brown book into the basket and slamming it shut with finality. "Besides, we're leaving tomorrow morning."

"We are?" Why Eret couldn't just sit down and tell me these things instead of dashing off to do them, I would never figure out.

"You did say his wing was healed up enough to fly again, right?"

"Yes," I admitted slowly. "I justâ€¦I thought we were going to wait a bit longer."

"You're the one who wanted to leave so quickly in the first place," he pointed out with a shrug, picking up the basket and setting it back against the wall. "Having second thoughts?"

"No," I responded immediately, watching as the Nadder nuzzled Eret's shoulder, looking for attention. "I justâ€¦I meanâ€¦I do want to go, I want to see Toothless, butâ€¦" I sighed softly, dropping my gaze to the ground.

"But?" he prodded, patting the Nadder's nose affectionately. The dragon gave him a lick, and Eret grinned slightly to himself, scratching under the dragon's chin.

"Nothing. But nothing. I'm being stupid, that's all. Everything will be fine."

"Mm." Eret cocked an eyebrow, but let it go. "Well, you'd better get some sleep, Hiccup. We'll be leaving tomorrow, so you'll want to be rested. I can't see myself figuring out how to ride a dragon alone, and something tells me that you don't run very well on no sleep."

"Who does?" I muttered, reluctantly settling back down in my little nest of blankets. I stared unseeingly up at the ceiling for a moment, listening to the crackling of the fire suddenly drowned out by the splashing of water, the soft hiss and sputter of dying embers.

"Eret?" I whispered as the room turned dark with the sudden approach of night.

"Yeah?" He crawled over to his own makeshift bed on the floor, sinking down into the blankets.

I hesitated for a second. How did I thank him for everything he had done? Sheltering me, giving me a place to hide even though he had his suspicions about me, trusting me in spite of everything about me that screamed I wasn't to be trusted?

"Never mind," I mumbled, rolling over and turning away from him. He didn't try to bring it back up again, leaving me alone to my own thoughts. I closed my eyes, not really focused on sleeping, too

focused on worrying. What was going to happen to me when I landed back on Berk? I would reunite with Toothless, of that I was certain, but everything afterwards felt fuzzy, like a house built upon sand instead of solid rock. What was going to happen? Was Stoick the Vast going to be a kind, loving father, or was he going to cast me away too, the same way Alvin had?

I had an awful feeling that the second situation was more likely. If anybody ever wanted me, I would worry so much for their sanity, it isn't even funny. And if he did want meâ€¦

If he did, how was I going to handle that? How could I take it, something as beautiful as family after something as ugly as what Alvin had done to me? And what if that beautiful little thing called family passed me by, and my real father decided I wasn't worth it, wasn't worth being "fixed" or whatever? What if he didn't love me? He didn't have to abuse me to hate me.

I couldn't stop the worrying thoughts running through my head, but I must have fallen asleep sometime through all that worrying, because when loud noises startled me up, I registered having been asleep. Thumping footsteps on dry grass, stalking triumphantly closer to me. Everything around me was dark, so black I could barely see my surroundings. I sat up, feeling around with my hands, trying to guess where I was before remembering that I was still in Eret's hideout.

I could see the vague outline of the man, crouched by the door, one hand upon the wood, leaning very close. I could hear him calling my name in the thick darkness. "Hiccup," he breathed, "get out of here. Run."

"What's going on?" I asked groggily, probably louder than I should have. "Eret, what's wrong?"

"No time to ask questions," he said quietly, springing up from his position like a cat and leading the Nadder carefully over to me. Patting the Nadder on the nose, he continued, "We need to leave. Now."

"Why?" I demanded, now wide awake, crawling over to him. "What's going on?"

"The Outcasts got past the garden, we need to leave."

"What? How?!"

"I don't know! Search me! Just c'mon, c'mon, c'monâ€¦" Eret began running his fingers along the wall of the hideout, frantically praying to deities I had never heard of. "Please let it be here, please let it be here, please let itâ€¦" "YES!" he cheered, ripping open a tiny back door that blended in so well with the wood that I had never noticed it before. He ushered me and the Nadder outside. "C'mon, let's go."

"How did they get past the garden?" I whispered, mostly to myself as I began to climb on the Nadder's back.

"No idea," he panted, clambering up beside me. The dragon twitched slightly when he climbed on, but I didn't know why. "Let's get going."

There came a sudden pounding on the door of the hideout. "Oh, no," Eret breathed, going white. "My pack! If the Outcasts find itâ€"!"

"Can't it wait?!"

"No, you don't understand what's in there! Wait right here!" Eret jumped off the Nadder once again, running in as fast as he could, hurtling through the back door again.

"Hurry!" I whispered, but he didn't look back. I waited for several heart-stopping moments, unable to stand the utter stillness.

And then I heard a huge crash and a scream.

"Eret!"

"RUN!"

"Eret!" I screamed, bolting off the dragon and trying to run back to the hideout but Eret appeared at the back door. From the glimpse I got inside, I was thinking they had used explosives to get in; thick gray smoke covered the scene.

"Be quiet!" he hissed, before an Outcast emerged from the fray and grabbed Eret from behind, dragging him back into the smoke. I gave another scream, reaching for him, but he kept yelling at me to run.

"I can't leave you!"

"Hiccup, go!"

A bit of dust cleared, and I saw everything crystal clear: the Outcast holding Eret grabbed his head and cracked it, hard, against the wooden wall, making a sickening sound as he slumped limply to the floor, unconscious. But Alvin's mean little brown eyes sought me, standing next to the Nadder. Without a word, the dragon flipped me onto his back again, soaring off into the sky. I think I might have been screaming, tearing at the iridescent purple scales, yelling for the stupid dragon to _go back, go back, go back. _Eret must have won the creature's loyalty on a larger scale, because he obeyed the man's commands instead of mine.

"Please!" I cried desperately, practically sobbing as I pummeled my fists on my bad knee in frustration, the stupid prosthetic leg that I still understood nothing about. "Please, we have to go back!"

The dragon offered me an apologetic purr, but I realized it was pointless: we were probably too far away by now to get to him. For some strange reason, I had the feeling that the Nadder had a point to all this, a _reason_ for not turning back. And I wanted to protest it, for Eret, but I knew that, alone, I was no use to Eret. Injured, alone and unaided, I could do nothing if he had been kidnapped by Outcasts. But with Toothless by my side, and maybe if I was lucky, some people on Berk who didn't _completely_ detest meâ€|

As we soared up into the dark blue sky, I fell against the Nadder's neck, burying my face in the scales, still cool, not yet warmed by a

sun that hadn't risen. The sky was still cloudy and dark, only a tinge of pink off to the east hinting that dawn was near. I kept seeing Eret in my mind's eye, the handsome face twisted in pain, but I forced the image back when I saw the Outcast ships not far from me on the water. How they had managed to catch up so fast, I wouldn't know. I had had quite the head start, and a dragon was much faster than a boat.

When I dared to dip below the clouds, a few of the ships launched nets at me, so I didn't venture very low very often. We climbed as high as we dared, the oxygen becoming thinner and thinner with each beat of the Nadder's wings, and, with each beat of his wings, I wanted to make him turn back and fetch Eret, yet I knew he wouldn't, and I knew it wasn't a smart idea. I was stupid, but not that stupid.

The Nadder must have known where Berk was located, because when I realized that he didn't know where to land and I told him, he purred like he understood and changed direction completely, doing a turnaround in midair and heading off to the east instead, where the sun was almost completely risen by now.

By the time Berk appeared on the horizon as a small speck, it was high in the sky, blindingly bright and beating down on me with such intensity that I took my vest off due to heat, laying it over my knees. And by the time we were close enough to the island that I could actually land, it was storming so badly that we could barely fly straight, making my stomach clench with the loud booms and crashes. I dipped below the clouds. The Outcast ships were gone. No trace of them anywhere. They must have left, given up due to the storm, I figured. Yet it left me with an odd feeling of uncertainty.

"Go lower." I pushed the worries from my mind.

The Nadder instantly dropped, circling the island and depositing me gently onto the beach, and I accidentally inhaled several grains of sand, instantly sneezing them out again.

My ears were attacked by a barrage of noise, and when I looked up, I could see people running towards me, my brain running in circles and beating itself against the wall of my head with how much it recognized these people. I felt a sudden sense of being home, and for the first time, Eret was forgotten for moments as a feeling of rightness filled my heart.

14. Hiccup's Story

Unbreakable

_The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'. _

Chapter 14: Hiccup's Story

**A/N: Yeah. So. Yeah. This is the fourteenth chapter. I'm reaching the point I was really eager to write, so chapters should be a little faster, but don't take my word for it. I woke up to a crap load of

reviews and 4 private messages this morning from you all :D Thank you, really. I wouldn't be anywhere without my readers. I wouldn't have honed my writing as much as I have this year, and I definitely wouldn't have written 300k this year alone if not for you guys' unwavering support. Really, thank you. And here's an extra-long chapter to show my gratitude. **

* * *

><p>Toothless was the first to get to me, physically pinning me down on the sand and licking me all over, my cheeks and my forehead and my neck, which tickled a little. He didn't seem to notice, or care, about the storm raging overhead, and even when the rain slackened off, he wouldn't let me up. A blonde girl with her hair in a braid and an axe in her hands was the next to get to me, gently pushing Toothless out of the way. For a moment, neither of them wanted to back down, but eventually Toothless rolled his green eyes and let me up.<p>

The blonde girl didn't say anything for a long moment. She stared at me, drinking me in, and then her pretty blue eyes flashed. And she reared her fist back, punching my good shoulder as hard as she could. "That was for scaring me!" She yelled, before scrambling forward and surprising me by pulling me into a tight hug. I hesitated for a long moment before hugging her back, my hands resting carefully on the thick fabric of her blue shirt.

"What was that for?" I demanded when she'd finally pulled away. "Why would you do that? The punching, I mean? I'm already wounded in one area!"

A brown-haired boy, with his helmet slightly askew, came rushing forward. He didn't hesitate, or stare at me, or punch me the way the girl had, but he also pulled me into a hug. These people were clearly very open to touch, and I didn't really know how to tell them no. I tried to coax myself into hugging him back like I had with the girl, but by the time I was steeling myself to do so, rather awkwardly, he'd pulled away, looking embarrassed at his display of affection.

A husky blonde boy practically bowled me over with how hard he came at me, and I thought my legs were collapsing. Thankfully, the blonde girl hauled him off of me with a single, strong pull, and a pair of identical twins came rushing at me next. They didn't really want to hug me, though; mostly they just wanted to punch me, but Gobber, the man from my dream, managed to stop them, for which I was very grateful. He gave me a bright, friendly smile. "Welcome home."

I offered him a slight smile before my eyes fell on the other man from my dream, standing just beyond Gobber: Stoick the Vast. I swallowed nervously, lifting my head to meet his gray gaze. He was staring at me, at a complete loss for words, his gray eyes huge. And then, without warning, without even making a sound, his legs collapsed beneath him onto the sand, and he spread his arms wide, a silent invitation.

I regarded him self-consciously for a moment, until Gobber gave me a gentle push in his direction and I began to stumble forward. Stoick the Vast did not urge me to get there quicker; he just kept gazing silently at me, for all the world as if I was the last sight he would ever want to see. I finally reached him where he knelt, and even on

his knees, he was taller than I was. I offered him a small, slightly nervous smile, wondering if he was going to see my face, my arm in a sling, my ripped and torn clothes, my bruised countenance and push me away.

He wrapped his huge arms around me, pulling me into a hug, practically crushing me to his chest. I could hear his heart beating, even through the thick, armored clothing he wore, and for a moment, I sat stiffly in his arms, expecting a blow or a rejection, but none came. He hugged me tighter, and kissed the top of my head several times and I heard him whisper, "Oh, Hiccup, oh, my little boy, you're safe!"

I squeezed my eyes shut as memories began coming back, playing like a slideshow in my mind. This was the man who'd held me when I cried, who'd cradled me so gently when Alvin the Treacherous announced that I was his. And this man hadn't been disgusted when he realized that I belonged to Alvin, he'd loved me still.

There were some gaps in my memory: I still couldn't recall why I remembered feeling his warm arms around me, followed by a strange rocking motion, or why I felt just the hint of unease when I thought of him realizing I belonged to Alvin. But he could fill in these gaps. And he didn't hate me. He loved me. I remembered that now, remembered him saying it, just his touch and his gaze and the sound of his heartbeat bringing things back.

And then Toothless got impatient waiting for me to quit hugging him, and so he nuzzled his way into the embrace, too. I laughed and it came out sounding slightly shaky, but I brushed at my eyes, hoping to banish any lingering tears or uncertainties. I stole a quick glance at " _wow, was this man really my dad? _" and he smiled at me. His gray eyes looked a bit bright, too, but Toothless gave me a bit of a nip, pining for attention, and I obediently scratched the dragon under the chin, resting my head on top of his. And for a moment, even with those uneasy gaps in my memory, everything felt perfect, everything felt _right_.

* * *

><p>The people of Berk were nice, but they were unreasonable. And when I say that, I mean it. They were worse than Alvin when it came to sheer Viking stubbornness.<p>

When the blonde girl with the axe " whose name turned out to be Astrid " caught me saddling up Toothless just an hour afterward and promising the pale purple Nadder, who kept trying to stop me, that I would be back with Eret soon, she demanded to know what I was doing, and where I was going, despite the fact that it really wasn't her business.

And then, once I'd very calmly and rationally explained exactly where I was going, even though I didn't really owe her an answer, she got so mad. I mean, for no reason. Really. She started yelling, mostly about, _"Do you know how long you've been gone? Huh? Do you?" _and _"We were all worried sick about you, Hiccup!" _and, _"If you leave now, you'll be tearing Stoick apart! Don't you ever think of anyone else?"_

And then, to top it off, she tattled on me, to Gobber, who tattled to

my dad (Thor, I still couldn't get over that that's who he was) and Dad absolutely refused to let me go. He spouted off some nonsense about how I was being hunted by Alvin and how they just couldn't lose me again, not after getting me back so soon. And Gobber informed me that I was being a reckless idiot, and, considering how bad my dad had been at that age, he should have been more proud than angry.

Dad gave him a burning look when he said that. "You don't have to do that," he snapped, and Gobber shrugged in response, making me smile a little. Their easy friendship was comforting and nice to watch.

And then I remembered that I was being scolded and I shook it off. "No, seriously, I need to get out there and go back for Eret," I insisted. "He was wounded when he left, but the Outcasts didn't want him, they wanted me, so they might have left him alone on his island again."

Dad and Gobber both exchanged glances and then blinked a little at me, uncomprehending. I sighed, and then I had to go through the whole story again, about Eret and everything, skipping over his crazy claims that I was a King because I wasn't quite ready to deal with that yet. I told them about how he'd been willing to help me get back to Berk, and even given up his own life for my sake. "So, we just get him back and everything should be alright, provided the garden doesn't eat me—oh, wait, the Outcasts found a way past the garden and it didn't eat me before—"

Gobber's eyes went wide. "Provided the garden doesn't _what_?"

"Oh, eat me," I explained with a shrug. "It likes to do that, but it's really Eret's only form of self-defense, so—"

"Hiccup—" Dad sighed a little. "Can you please start from the beginning? You never even told us what happened to you yet."

"I wish somebody could explain what happened to me," I mumbled bitterly before raising my voice. "Okay, well, as a warning, there will be some gaps in my memory, considering all the memory loss Alvin gave me—"

"The _what_?"

"You know, for people who want to hear my story, you're terrible for interrupting. I really think this can wait and that you should let me get Eret first thing."

"I'm not rescuing anybody who has a garden that eats people," Gobber responded stubbornly.

I rolled my eyes. "It's just his burglar alarm."

"Burglar alarm?" Gobber sputtered.

Dad silenced him with a glare. "Just tell us what happened, Hiccup." His expression softened when he looked at me.

"We're wasting time," I mumbled. "And like I said, there are going to be some gaps, so I would appreciate it if you guys could fill them in for me when I'm done, but right now I've got this figured out. I was apparently captured by Alvin thanks to Humongous, only there was some

weird spell that made me lose my memory and I feel like I'm forgetting what happened before that, but you guys can probably fill me in on thatâ€¦ And then, oh, yeah, Humongous got me out of the Outcast cellâ€¦"

It was Dad who interrupted this time, with a cough and splutter that made him sound like he was choking. _"Humongous?" _

"Yeah, we stole a boat and got pretty far away from Outcast Island, only he couldn't really fill me in that well, except he thought you might have been abusing me, or you might have really loved me, but Alvin told him you were abusing me. So I thought maybe you were, too, because that would make more sense than you loving me, so I won't be surprised if you hit me, just so you know, to put your mind at ease about thatâ€¦"

Dad looked nothing less than horrified now as he regarded me, but it seemed he was speechless, because he didn't interrupt again.

"And yeah, then they caught up to our boat, the Outcasts, and revealed our escape had been planned by them, apparently, but whatever happened with that, I'm not really sureâ€¦yeah, and then it turned out we weren't anywhere near Berk, and we got blasted onto another island, andâ€¦Humongousâ€¦" My story flickered out and I felt my eyes growing wet. I hadn't really cried in a long time, and I felt the urge to burst into tears again. "Humongousâ€¦heroes who d-die in battle go straight to Valhalla."

Gobber's expression softened in pity, but Dad muttered something under his breath that I didn't catch. The blonde man threw him a sharp look.

"Yeah, soâ€¦" I dropped my gaze to the floor. "So, umâ€¦and then I ran across Eret's, you know, man-eating garden there, except it wouldn't eat me because apparently I wasn't greedy enough to trigger them or something, and then Eret decided to threaten me with death, only then he bonded with himâ€¦" I jerked my head at the pale purple Nadder, looking anxious to get his friend back. "And so that happened, and he started to kind of like me, I think, and crap happened and then the Outcasts invaded the hideout by somehow getting past the garden and yeah." I folded my hands in my lap, sitting back in my chair. "The end."

A ringing silence followed my words, a silence in which Gobber looked from me to Dad and back again, raising an eyebrow as if watching a very interesting argument. Dad's mouth fell all the way open, and he gazed at me, speechless, for several long seconds. And then the explosion started.

"Alvin wiped your _memory_? How theâ€¦_what_ theâ€¦_why_ the_â€¦man-eating garâ€¦Humongous? Butâ€¦_what_?"

"I just told you the whole story, I'm not explaining it again," I folded my arms over my chest. "I'm going after Eret, though, and I'm getting him back safely. He gave up everything for me, I can't forget that."

In his anger, Dad had jumped from his chair, but now he sort of sank back down, looking a little lost. "You can't go, Hiccup," he managed to sputter out, finally. "I meanâ€¦Alvin is probably looking for you

all overâ€”

"No, he knows I'm on Berk, I think," I responded, shaking my head. "So, it'll actually work out great when I go. I'll lead him around one of the islands and make it seem like we're on that one, and then get away and back to Eret's as fast as I can, and then back to Berk, so Alvin won't even touch this place." I waited for Dad and Gobber to agree. They exchanged loaded looks.

"What?" I demanded, raising an eyebrow, a little uneasy due to their silence.

"You're not going." Dad announced at last. "This isn't about the safety of Berk, that's not what I mean. I'm scared for your safety."

"That's pretty stupid." I didn't realize what I'd said until I'd blurted out and I had a moment of fear, a sudden spasm in my chest when I realized how disrespectful I sounded. I felt certain that he was going to lean over and smack me, but when he made no moves and I remembered how comforting and warm he felt to me, I allowed myself to relax a little. "I meanâ€”I meanâ€”" I struggled to regain my composure. "I mean the village is more important than I am, a hundred times over, really. You're the chief of this island, and you need to focus on the people before you can focus on your family."

I lifted my chin, feeling reasonably confident that I'd made a good argument, and feeling increasingly proud of myself when Gobber murmured, "Stoick, the lad's got a point."

Dad huffed in response.

"So, yeah, it would work best if I went, would it not?"

"No." Dad's reply was sharp and quick, leaving no room for arguments. "I'm not letting you do this to yourself. I'll send a few of my men out to search the island and I'll goâ€”"

"You can't leave the village at a time like this," Gobber pointed out. "You'll be begging for an Outcast attack, especially considering that they know that Hiccup made it back safely, and is going to regain his memory here."

"Oh, yeah, about that." I jumped on my chance as it arose in the conversation. "Whatever happened to my leg? Do you mind filling me in?"

15. Stoick's Story

Unbreakable

_The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.__

Chapter 15: Stoick's Story

**A/N: Okay! Hello once again, to all of you beautiful people. Thank you so much for checking out this story. I have had an immensely

crappy day, but it got better the moment I sat down to write. This chapter was helped along by my friend, RazzlePazzleDooDot. I think she's gonna like this chapter, not just because I used her idea but also for the sheer angst xD to quote one of her reviews: "No matter how many times Hiccup thinks Stoick is going to hit/beat him, I never get tired of it". So, yes. I hope she likes this xD I originally had a different idea as to what happens for the story, but this seemed like a better way to go. **

* * *

><p>For a second, I didn't think Dad or Gobber was going to answer me. They both exchanged heavy glances, and Gobber shook his head sadly, not like he was cautioning Dad not to tell or anything, just a sad little shake. Like he'd heard this story before, and didn't want to hear it again.<p>

Dad leaned over, reaching for me, and I instinctively drew away. He didn't come forward threateningly or anything, but still "you could never be too careful. And besides, I didn't like being touched all that well, anyway. It was better to just leave that out of the equation.

Dad frowned a little, and I wondered if maybe I had angered him by refusing to let him touch me. "Hiccup" He leaned back in his chair again with a slight sigh. "The Outcasts"well, how much do you remember?"

"Wait, so Alvin did have something to do with my leg?" I asked, sitting up a little straighter. "I thought that at first, too, but something tells me that he would have bragged more about it in front of me had he been the one to do it."

Dad's gray eyes softened in pity. They seemed to do that a lot whenever I spoke, and I didn't like it one bit. "Hiccup, what do you remember?" he pressed gently.

I frowned thoughtfully. "I remember a couple of things, but"not anything solid. Like I remember a couple times where I ate dinner at your houseand then there is one time, but I don't remember anything past that, sooh, er, yeah, and I remember now, the Outcasts did attack here, searching for me, right? Sorry about that if they caused any destruction, my memory's kinda hazy"

"Actually, it sounds like you've gotten the important bits," Gobber assured me. "Do you remember crashing on Berk?"

I shook my head slightly. "I'm not really getting full memories, I'm just kind of getting flashes. That sounds familiar, but I can't know for sure."

"Well, you crashed onto Berk, and one of our archers shot an arrow that completely destroyed Toothless' prosthetic fin" Gobber gestured to the dragon behind my chair.

Somewhere in the middle of my story, Toothless had stopped pining for my attention and sank down on the floor, curling up for a nap. Now I looked down at him, remembering how we'd gone hurtling down to the shore, how he'd grabbed me in his talons, stopped me from colliding

painfully with the ground at a height that could have meant death. And I remembered seeing the awful havoc that one arrow had wrought on his weak tail fin. I hadn't taken the time to make it strong. I had only wanted to escape, that much I remembered.

"Yeah," I nodded. "That sounds about right."

Gobber seemed heartened by this display of memory, even though it'd only come back to me after he'd said something. "And you ended up using my tools to fix his tail, remember? You wound up helping me in the forge after you'd completed the tail fin, and you stayed until midwinter."

I smiled, but the word 'winter' had a memory floating back to me, a memory of Gobber and Dad â€" Stoick, my mind kept insisting I call him that, even though I knew he was my father, and his first name felt disrespectful. I remembered Gobber and Stoick, I guess, sitting at the table in the kitchen, and Gobber laughing, saying, "You don't ever want to leave Berk in winter. You're pretty much guaranteed frostbite." _

I glanced up at them curiously. "Wait, but I thought Berk was almost completely overrun by blizzards and stuff in winter? If memory serves, I mean, which it hasn't, of late."

Gobber smiled a little and nodded. "Yeah, the Berk winters are pretty harsh. Why do you ask?"

"Then why did I leave in the middle of one? I mean, again, if memory serves, you guys told me not to leave in winter because the snow was so strong and thick."

Gobber's mouth opened. No words came out. He closed it again, looked at Dadâ€"Stoickâ€"and opened it. Then he closed it. Then he opened it. Then he closed it. Then he opened it. "Outcasts."

I raised my eyebrows. "The Outcasts got hold of me again, I guess? Then, how does Humongous figure into all of this?"

Dad took a deep breath. "The thing isâ€|there are things you need to know, andâ€|"

"I'm gonna examine your carvings," Gobber muttered uneasily, rising from his chair and sidling out of the room, giving Stoick â€" or Dad, whatever â€" a pointed look as he went.

Dad pushed his Viking helmet a little farther up his head, glanced back to make sure Gobber was really gone, and thenâ€| Just when I thought he was going to say something, he seemed to find something fascinating on the tabletop, for he stared at it for a long moment. "Hiccupâ€|umâ€|" he closed his eyes, and he wouldn't look at me. "You left Berk to go away with Toothlessâ€|we said that winter wasn't a recommended time to leave, butâ€|"

This wasn't sounding familiar at all. This wasn't making memories play inside my head, but I told myself that he was telling the truth. It must have been a painful truth, had no happy ending, because he looked so upset. "Once you left, Outcasts attacked, looking for you. And so, you flew back to Berk in the hopes that you could hold them offâ€|what you were thinking, I'm not sureâ€|" His voice grew

noticeably stronger, and he took shorter pauses between words. "And Alvin caught you, and heâ€¦it was then that he cut your leg."

I winced, my hand going down to the stump. It wasn't hurting, but hearing about it coming off â€" and this part rang true within my memory â€" was making me cringe in remembered pain. "Yeah, that part definitely sounds about right."

Dad dropped his eyes to the tabletop again. "I'm sorry," he whispered hoarsely.

I shrugged. "No big deal. I can obviously walk on it again, and it's not even hurting, so I'll be fine. In a couple months, I bet I won't even remember it's there." I rose from my chair. "Well, now that that's settled â€" and thank Thor, too, I was actually really worried that you might have chopped my leg off, from the way Humongous spoke about you."

Dad didn't laugh, even though it was kind of a joke. He winced a little, and his gray gaze silently refused to meet mine. "You should get upstairs, get some rest."

"The sun isn't even down yet," I pointed out. "Besides, it's useless, I won't be able to sleep anyway. Not until Eret's back with us." I turned to Toothless, regretting having to wake him up. He looked as tired as I felt, and I knew that he hadn't gotten much sleep while I was gone.

The storm had ceased while we spoke, and Gobber grunted something about, "Oh, now it clears."

Toothless awoke with a start, opening his large green eyes and licking my cheek. I smiled at him, rubbing away the saliva and reaching up to climb on his back.

"What are you doing?" Dad demanded suddenly, making me turn.

I looked at him for a second, uncertain. "Umâ€¦going to get Eret."

"We were just over this," Gobber groaned. "You're supposed to stay here! Alvin will be around this area waiting for you to come back! He probably left Eret there as bait for you!"

"Well, I should be the one to get him!" I retorted, practically stamping a foot in frustration. "It's my own stupid fault he got left there, soâ€¦"

"But you're not going to get him," Dad interrupted sternly, picking me up embarrassingly easily by the collar of my vest and plunking me down on the stairs. "You'll be in bed, and I'll send a few men out to get him. Alvin won't hurt anyone he doesn't need; he won't want to make a move that risks giving away his position, or his plan."

I gave him the most venomous glare I could muster, but something tells me that he wasn't very intimidated. "I'll be fine."

"I know you will be, because you're definitely not going," he growled. "You will stay here, even if I have to handcuff you to the wall."

I didn't mean to; it was instinctive. I flinched back from him, dropping my head, staring at my knees, ready to go along with whatever he wanted. "Okay." My voice came out surprisingly small, considering that my heart was thumping so loudly in my chest. "Okay. I'm sorry."

I was ready to call him my dad in my head, ready to accept that this was my father, but why was there something there, why was there this seed of uneasiness? He had done nothing to get me to distrust him this way, except get on Humongous' bad side, apparently, but that might have just been that they didn't like each other. There was no reason for me to feel this way, for me to be so afraid of him. I was naturally afraid of a lot of Viking men; they all reminded me of Alvin, so big and loud and hulking, and yet, this man felt different. Gobber was the kind of person whom I could look at and instantly trust. With his open eyes and ready smile, he seemed like he had nothing to hide.

But my fatherâ€¦

There was something off about him still, and I couldn't figure out what it was. He had hugged me, he had wrapped me in a warm embrace and held me once when I cried, and I vividly remembered him defending me once against Alvin, but there was a vital puzzle piece missing from the puzzle, a piece that made me feel uneasy and scared, though I had no idea why.

So I crouched there on the stairs, heart pounding furiously in my chest, waiting breathlessly for him to do as he said, handcuff me to the wall.

But instead of yelling at me, or speaking angrily, my father's voice came out hoarse and sad and quiet. "Ohâ€¦no, Hiccup. I'm so sorry. I didn't meanâ€¦I would neverâ€¦I wouldn't, really."

I tried to keep my eyes trained on my knees, but I sneaked a quick peek up at him through a thin curtain of my hair hanging over my forehead. He didn't appear angry, just honestly upset. He had honestly forgotten that a few words could upset me that badly. I could tell that he felt guilty, so I tried my hardest to brush it off. "It's okay. I mean, handcuffing me to the wall would certainly be efficient, huh?"

"I'm sorry," My father repeated helplessly.

I tried to shrug. "It's okay, I just said that. I thinkâ€¦I think I'm gonna go up to bed now."

I started up the stairs, and neither man tried to stop me. I closed my bedroom door as I heard Gobber begin to whisper, "Stoick, what did you tell him?"

I flopped down onto the bed before Toothless' telltale scratching at the wood reminded me that I'd forgotten to let him in. I allowed myself a small smile as I opened the door again, letting him run in and curl up beside the bed, crooning softly.

"I'm okay," I assured him quietly. "I'm just tired. I'll feel better in the morning, when everything with Eret is settled again." I

thought for a second, staring up at the ceiling. "And when I get to wash again, of course. Those Outcast cells are so grimy."

16. Remembering

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 16: Remembering

**A/N: Well, this is my newest chapter :D I really hope everyone enjoys, even though it is kinda short...chapter 17 will pick up the plot a bit, I hope. I really hope this story hasn't been dragging too much, because it feels a bit like since Hiccup made it back to Berk and when he met Eret, things started dragging. I might either be luring my readers into a false sense of security or boring them. I don't know which one. Well, let me know in the reviews :) I wrote this listening to my 'Favorites' playlist on Youtube and I would just like to say that as I wrote this, a fan video for Jack Frost with Jessica Simpson's 'Irresistible' came on. I swear to God that seeing that sexy beast helps me write ;) **

* * *

><p>The last thing I wanted that night was one of my strangely vivid dreams, the ones that always seemed to come true.<p>

Of course, being the last thing I wanted, it was exactly what I got.

It took awhile for me to actually get tired enough to sleep; I couldn't stop thinking about my father's threats to handcuff me to the wall, for one, and I kept wondering what Gobber meant when he asked what he'd told meâ€|

Toothless absolutely refused to settle down until I did, curling up on the end of the bed at my feet like some sort of overgrown guard dog. I sent him an amused glance as I rolled over, trying to get comfortable. He shifted when I did, blinking open sleepy green eyes and watching me worriedly until I flopped down again.

I shook my head, an amused grin stretching my lips. "Alvin's not gonna come sneaking through the window, Toothless, I'm fine. Go to sleep."

His very mature and rational response was to whap me with his tail and roll over.

I yawned and glared at him. "Useless reptile. You act like you want to protect me, and then pummel me." I put my head back on the pillow, staring at the door. I guess I kept waiting, slightly on edge, for it to open, but when it finally did, I was half-asleep. I think I would have jerked up instantly, looking around for the intruder, but I heard the uneven footsteps of the blacksmith and I relaxed, until I recognized the touch as my father's on my shoulder. I tried my hardest not to flinch.

"See," Gobber whispered consolingly, "he's perfectly okay, Stoick."

My father sighed softly, and I felt his beard tickle my nose as he stooped to kiss my forehead. "Sleep well, son," he whispered in my ear.

I knew that he thought that I was asleep, so I forced my breathing to continue in a deep, even pattern until he and Gobber had turned and exited the room once more.

I opened my eyes the moment the door had closed behind him, glancing down at Toothless, still wide awake at my feet. I sighed and closed my eyes again, trying to force myself into sleep, shoving away my worry for Eret and for myself. I would have time to think about all this tomorrow, when I'd had a bit of a rest.

* * *

><p>I was outside of my own body, watching myself through what felt like dirty glass. I could see myself acting the part, and I somehow knew what the other me would do before he even did it. It wasn't like my other dreams; in my other ones, people always took notice of me, but no matter how much I shouted or screamed, they didn't look this time around.<p>

Alvin and the witch were shoving me â€" the other me, I mean â€" roughly along, with my hands bound firmly behind my back. I stumbled and fell, but Alvin pulled me upright, holding me out in front of the witch, who stopped dead center and began a slow chant â€" a spell, I realized. I heard the words, and it was like I'd heard them once before, and I remembered the awful pain in my head, the pounding and ringing. I knew that I was going to slump to my knees before I even did it, and I saw Alvin picking me back up under the arms, and the other me looked like he was about to cry, and I remembered feeling that way. This wasn't the future. This was the past, I realized.

"Please," the other me pleaded, breathless and nearly sobbing. "Please let me rest."

"Start walking," Alvin snapped.

"No, pleaseâ€|just let me restâ€|please, it hurts so muchâ€|"

"Hiccup," the witch spoke again, but this time it was no spell. **"You know that you know where the Dragon Jewel is." **

The name stirred something in my memory, but I just couldn't think what. I watched myself running, over the grass, sinking to my knees suddenly, ripping up handfuls of the dead, brown grass that barely even grew on Outcast Island, just sat in the ground and died every winter like clockwork. I watched as I dug my nails into the dirt, ripping up roots and plants and things, before I saw myself draw a deep breath, pulling out a bright, glistening red ruby. The other me sighed in contentment, nestling it close to my chest, and I remembered a feeling of complete calm washing over me then.

And then the feeling ended, was yanked away from me by Alvin's dirty hands, and the other me tried to protest, to grab the jewel back, but Alvin just laughed and the witch began to move her hands in odd movements. A dark, shadowy mist stole over the other me, and I could see, through the thick fog, the other me going limp.

"Mother, what are you doing?" Alvin hissed at the witch. "His brain will get addled by all these spells if you're not careful!"

"It's just a simple Forget-Me charm, darling," the witch explained with a dismissive wave of her hand. "He won't remember any of this tomorrow."

I sat bolt upright in bed, sweating and shaking and probably screaming my head off, I couldn't tell. I think I might have even been crying a little, because my cheeks were wet when I pressed my hands over my eyes, trying to destroy the image I had just seen.

Because I remembered. I remembered everything Eret had told me about the Lost Things, the King of the Wilderwest, and, most importantly, the Dragon Jewel. I had found the Dragon Jewel for Alvin and the witch. And, according to Eret, only the true King of the Wilderwest could find those Lost Things. Alvin and the witch had enchanted me, forced me to find it for them. And if I hadn't been the true King, it wouldn't have worked on me. I wouldn't have remembered a driving, pushing need to find what she told me to find, I wouldn't have felt that surge of confidence when I realized that, here was something I could do right.

Toothless jerked awake, too, dozing on the job, I supposed, but that was okay. The dragon needed rest, just as much as I did. Probably more, really. I had been able to fall asleep a couple times in Eret's hideout, but by the way he looked, Toothless hadn't gotten a wink of sleep while I was gone. "Go back to sleep," I whispered to him in the darkness.

Remembering the time spent in Eret's hideout brought me sharply back to the present, the sound of owls hooting outside my window, the stars offering little light into my bedroom. The way Eret had spoken, the Dragon Jewel was supposed to be really important. And it just sounded important. The very name made the hairs on the back of my neck stand straight up.

And I had found it. I had found it for Alvin and the witch. I didn't want to be a King, I just wanted to survive. I couldn't be King. I wasn't anything special. I was actually painfully ordinary. But then why had I been able to find the Dragon Jewel?

I shoved my face in my pillow to muffle the frustrated screams rising in my throat. Toothless gave a worried croon, nuzzling my arm, the closest part of me he could reach that wasn't buried in the pillow.

"I'm okay," I mumbled, unwilling to come out of my safe little hideout so soon. "I think I've just had an earth-shattering epiphany is all."

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 17: Myth or Fact

**A/N: Hey, guys. Short. I'm sorry. I'm so tired... **

* * *

><p>Broaching the subject at dawn next morning was not something that I wanted to do, but I couldn't just keep worrying about it. I had to say something. I descended the staircase to see my father talking to the old Soothsayer " who, if memory served, was my grandfather " beside the cold, dark hearth. There was no fire, but the metal poker was clutched in my grandfather's shaking hand. The moment I appeared in the living room, the older man jumped to his feet and dashed across the room to sweep me up in such a tight hug that I thought he might crack my ribs. I winced, trying to pull away without looking rude. "Erm"hello?"<p>

"Oh, sorry." He seemed to realize how uncomfortable I felt, because he released me almost at once. "I'm just so glad you're back" I didn't think you were coming back, based on how I couldn't see your future."

Yep. Definitely my grandfather. I remembered that conversation vividly. I smiled awkwardly at him before my father pulled me back into the present.

"Let the boy breathe, Wrinkly," he cautioned. "He doesn't remember anything, I told you."

"Actually, I did remember some things," I said, following my grandfather back over by the fire and taking the seat he indicated. "I remembered them last night. Which is what I kind of wanted to talk about."

The effect of these words on my father was unmistakable. He froze, his face going white, his fingers clenching tight around the mug of honey-colored liquid he held. "Oh"you remembered some things, have you?"

"Yes," I responded uneasily, shifting my weight a bit in my chair. I still felt like there was something vitally important missing from my memory, but I was willing to let it slide until I had my answers about this. "Do you two, either of you"do you know anything about the King of the Wilderwest?"

The two reactions could not have been more opposite; my father snorted, his concerned look melting as he leaned back in his chair once again, but my grandfather's pale eyes widened and he nearly jumped out of his seat again. "The King of the Wilderwest?" he squealed.

I nodded uncertainly, waiting for an explanation.

"What did you remember? Tell me everything!" he commanded excitedly.

"It's a myth," my father countered.

My grandfather glared up at him. "I've been telling you for years, it's not a myth, it's real! Your great-great-great-great-grandfather was the one who gave the prophecy! Of all people, I'd expect you to still believe in it!"

"It's just an old fairy tale to entertain children." My father responded. "Maybe there is a prophecy, but nobody has seen items like the Lost Things for nearly a hundred years â€" it's not real."

My grandfather waved him off. "The Lost Things can only be found by those who are worthy, remember? And only the True King is worthy."

I stared down at my lap for a long second, suddenly feeling like explaining my dream would sound like I was making myself out to be more important than I really was.

"I'm sorry," My grandfather added to me. "Please explain why you asked."

I took a breath. "Um, you know what, it's probably not importantâ€"

"No, tell me," he commanded gently.

My father picked up a carving knife and a half-finished carving, clearly not interested. My eyes flickered briefly over to him before I spoke. The gesture was so familiar, so him, that it hurt.

"I remember why I forgot everything now." My voice came out barely above a whisper, and suddenly I was spilling everything, everything about how Alvin and the witch had enchanted me, forced me to find the Jewel for them, and I even confessed to Eret's claims that I was the King, stupid as they were, and how I wasn't sure anymore because apparently only the true King could find the Lost Things.

"You're it!" My grandfather hollered as my story drew to a close. "I knew it, I knew you were going to be the King, ohâ€| I tried telling myself it was just my heart, not my Sight, speaking when I promised your father that you were destined for greatness and you were said to be a stillborn! I knew it!" He drew me into yet another one of his bone-breaking hugs, beaming at me through his long white beard. "I knew it!" he repeated excitedly, before he frowned, drawing away from me.

"Oh, no."

"What?"

"This is awfulâ€|Hiccup, this means that Alvin and Excellinor have the tenth Lost Thing. They have the Dragon Jewel. Oh, noâ€|"

"Excellinor?"

"The witch, that's her name. Anyway, we need to get that Jewel back

as soon as possible"â€

"Why? What's it do? What's so special about it?"

My grandfather regarded me very seriously for a few moments. "With it, not only will he be able to become King once and for all," he declared softly, "but he can use it to control the dragons as well."

"What?" This time, it was me jumping out of my seat.
"Why?"

"Wrinkly, this is a myth," my father insisted. "Would you mind not getting my son so riled up?"

"It isn't a myth!" Wrinkly yelled. "You don't understand, Stoick, you weren't there when I was! You haven't seen what I've seen! You can never understand! The King of the Wilderwest is sitting right in front of you, and you still can't open your eyes!"

My father turned to look at me, and I found myself flinching a little.

"Oh, we need to get that Jewel back," Wrinkly moaned.

My father drew a deep breath. "Wrinkly." He turned to face the older man calmly. "Are you sure that he is the King?"

"I'm as sure as I am of my own name," my grandfather replied seriously.

Dad drew a deep breath. "Thenâ€|let's get going. If that Dragon Jewel does as you say, then we need to get it away from Alvin, and as soon as we can."

"Does this mean I can actually be of use for once?"

"No," My father snapped. "This, above all, proves that it's you that Alvin's after. I'm not letting you endanger yourself again."

I knew better than to try and argue; I just slumped down in my seat.

"I'll be going," he declared.

My grandfather's pale eyes widened. "That's not a good idea."

"I don't want anyone else getting mixed up in this."

"Stoick"â€

"Wrinkly. You don't understand. I trust you. I trust Gobber. That is the extent of it. I want this to be handled quietly. If anybody on Berk were to hear of a bright red jewel that we must get back from Alvin, do you know how many would connect the dots? We need to handle things quickly and quietly. And it'd be best if only one or two people went."

My grandfather looked thoughtful as he nodded. "I guess that makes

sense. I'm coming with you."

"No," My father's reply was instantaneous. "I'm sorry, but you're needed here. Your Sight is a wonderful help to the tribe, and I need you to stay here on Berk. I'll be taking Gobber, he's a great burglar. But I need you to stay and look after Hiccup."

"I can look after myself," I added.

"I know that." My father didn't miss a beat. "But if this whole thing turns out to be realâ€¦" Something in his words suggested that he trusted Wrinkly more than his own beliefs. "â€¦Then I want to make sure you're safe, now more than ever."

18. Choice

Unbreakable

_The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'. _

Chapter 18: Choice

**A/N: Well, here's the newest chapter. Another one where everybody kind of sits and converses instead of actually doing anything xD I'm sorry about that, and how short it is. Next time, I'll try and make it superlong, but no promises. Thank you for all the reviews! Please keep them coming? :D **

* * *

><p>Wrinkly wouldn't let Stoick go until he had looked into the fire and confirmed that all would be well on the journey. "I can't See much, but I See you triumphant, holding the Dragon Jewel as you fly away."<p>

"Wait, fly?" Dad demanded, his brow crinkling.

Wrinkly nodded happily. "Your steed appears to be a blue Thunderdrum. I think the waters of Berk are a favorite spot for them. Of course, you don't have to follow the vision exactly, but I'm thinking that you should go on a dragon. It's always best to have a quick escape if you need it."

Dad scowled at this. "So you're suggesting I ride a dragon to Outcast Island?"

Wrinkly nodded again. "Precisely."

Dad winced.

"Hiccup can help with that," the elderly man volunteered me happily. He didn't seem to notice when I glared at him.

"I'm not a very good teacher," I said pointedly.

"Miss Astrid Hofferson says you are," Wrinkly replied, completely missing the point.

"Really?" My previous concerns and all my uneasiness about my father flew out the window at these words. I hadn't expected a girl as pretty and tough as Astrid to have even known my name. Though I didn't remember much, I remembered liking her company when I had been on Berk.

Wrinkly raised his white eyebrows upon hearing the eagerness in my voice, and I sank back in my seat, pretending to have found a fascinating wood chip in the armrest of my chair.

"Well, the fact remains that I need to learn to fly," Dad jumped in.

Wrinkly looked to me again. How could I say no without looking like a total jerk?

"Gobber should be taught, too," Dad mused thoughtfully. "Seeing as he's coming with me, I meanâ€¦"

Wrinkly nodded. "That'd probably be best. Hiccup, do we have any already trained dragons on Berk?"

"Um, well, we have Toothless, Stormfly, Hookfang, Meatlug, Barf and Belch, but I don't think any of those breeds would be right for this kind of thing. It seems unlikely that they'd be able to hold his weight." Realizing what I'd just said, I winced and added quickly, "Sorry."

My father didn't seem to care; he was watching me ramble about the dragons with acute interest. "No, I couldn't take Toothless anywayâ€" the Outcasts would recognize your Night Fury and down him in seconds. I'm assuming they've memorized the way he flies after all your escape attempts?"

I tried to tell myself not to get so worked up that he knew about my escape attempts. "Yes."

"That actually might work wonders," Wrinkly put in. "They wouldn't be aiming to kill, only capture."

"No!" My voice surprised all three of us; it was more forceful than I wanted it to be. "You can't endanger Toothless like that."

The dragon in question rolled his green eyes at my words.

"I'm serious, buddy, you're not doing this," I snapped. "I can't risk you just because of something stupid that I did."

"Oh, yes, because getting enchanted and finding yourself unable to resist the spell is completely your fault," Wrinkly said sarcastically.

So, apparently crazy _and_ sarcasm ran in the family.

"I didn't say that," I responded angrily. "I meant â€" you know what, it doesn't matter what I meant. The point is, no one should be going. I'm sure that I'm not the real King, soâ€" "

"And I'm sure that you are," Wrinkly interrupted lightly. "I know it,

anyway. I've seen it."

I blinked in confusion. "Butâ€|but Alvin's the real King, right?"

"Forcing a young boy to find the Lost Things and stealing them off him isn't so Kingly," my grandfather snorted.

"But I meanâ€|haven't you seen it? In the fire?"

"Seen what?"

"Alvin! He's wearing a crown on his head! He's the King!"

"You found the _Crown_?"

"No! But I had a dream and I saw him wearing it, andâ€|andâ€|" my confidence flickered when I realized they were both gaping at me. "Um, is there a problem?"

"You're a Soothsayer!" Wrinkly's pale eyes glistened oddly. "Just like me! Youâ€|you can See things, just like I can!"

"What? Noâ€|no, I can't! I meanâ€|I'd know if I could!"

"Not always," he said in a hushed voice.

"This is crazy!" I shook my head. "My dream was just that! A weird dream! You're the real Soothsayer here! And anyway, if I'm supposed to be King or whatever, tell me why I Saw Alvin as King and you've Seen me as King?"

Wrinkly considered for a moment. "Soothsayers don't really see the future, Hiccup," he informed me after a pause. "Really, we See what could be, what might be. But in the end, our fate isn't really set in stone, or written in blood, or spelled out in the stars. We create our destiny, simply by making our own choices." He smiled at me. "So, yes, what I think that dream signifies is what might be. If you choose not to fight Alvin â€" which you have every right to choose either or â€" then he'll end up King."

My eyes widened. So those were my two choices? Fight Alvin the Treacherous for a position that I didn't even want, or let him have it? If I let him have it, I'd die, but that wasn't what bothered me most. What would happen to the other islands? The Hooligans and the Outcasts were in a blood feudâ€|the Outcasts hated almost every tribe except their ownâ€|what would happen to the people here? Would Alvin kill them all, once he had them completely at his mercy?

I wasn't too worried about Toothless, because according to Eret, he was a Lost Thing, so he shouldn't be in any danger. But what about the others?

I didn't want to fight Alvin, I realized. It wasn't just that I didn't want to be King â€" I just didn't want to fight anymore. I was tired of violence and pain, and waking up to my own blood every day. I was tired of running and hiding and being afraid, and I was tired of hearing those distant crashes from aboveground that signified a dragon raid or an attack from another tribe. I just wanted everyone to stop fighting.

Tears stung my eyes as I realized that all I really wanted was to stay here, far away from Kings and crowns and Lost Things and jewels. I just wanted to stay here, and feel like I was home again. I wanted all the uneasiness about my father to just fade away. I just wanted to feel safe again. I didn't want there to be war.

I felt this loss so keenly, this realization that I didn't have a choice anymore. The choice was not mine to make. My grandfather was wrong. Whatever he tried to say, he had been wrong. Sometimes, in our destinies, we didn't get to make our own choices. Because letting even one person pass into slavery was not a choice.

I lifted my head and looked at my father, feeling everything about me trembling.

"We can steal the Lost Things," he ventured uncertainly, "find somebody who's just as worthy as you, and give them the Things. They'll take up your place as King. Would that work?"

"No," Wrinkly cut in before I could answer. "If you did that, Hiccup's whole destiny would be shattered. There is no third option. It's fight Alvin or give it up."

"Then what do you suggest we do?"

"We need to let him make the decision, Stoick, and we need to respect it, whatever it might be."

They both looked to me, and I swallowed, realizing that I had to make the choice now. I didn't have room for hesitation, for uncertainty.

But I did hesitate, and I did feel uncertain as I met their eyes. No matter which way I turned, there was going to be a war. Berk would fight back against Alvin as their King, and if he didn't become their King, then I had to. There was going to be war either way, and I could do nothing to stop it.

19. A New Discovery

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 19: A New Discovery

A/N: I bet you guys totally didn't see THIS coming xD I'm so painfully predictable, I swear xD

* * *

><p>I knew they were waiting for my answer. I knew they both wanted me to accept this, to say yes. Of course I wanted to become King. Who didn't want to become King? This position sounded like an envied one, but that was the problem: I didn't want it. Whoever got it would be lucky to have it, sure, but that didn't mean that I wanted it. I

didn't care, honestly. I just hoped that whoever got the position would be a good leader.<p>

So, seeing as I couldn't honestly tell them yes, that I wanted to fight for it, that I wanted more war over a stupid title, I couldn't tell them no, either, and willingly surrender it. So I just stared at them helplessly, hoping that they could help me in my answer. Wrinkly lifted his eyebrows hopefully, scooting his chair forward a bit, as if not wanting to hear a word of my response.

"Iâ€¦umâ€¦I don'tâ€¦" The realization of what was going to happen crashed over me. Alvin the Treacherous as King, tons of people dead, even more in slaveryâ€¦ Villages burning. People taking sides. No place would be safe. There would be no more hideouts like Eret's, because everywhere people went to try and escape, Alvin and his Outcasts would hunt them down and find them. I had been running from him for the better part of four years, and I knew that when he was really determined to find something, he found it, whether you wanted him to or not.

And I guess the only excuse was that I'd been doing it so long, it was the only response that came naturally. Instead of answering in words, I turned and ran out the back door, leaving it open long enough only for Toothless to join me before slamming it shut again, sinking back against the wooden steps. I didn't remember everything from my time on here, but I had the feeling that my father had the annoying habit of chasing me down whenever I ran away, so I hoped he wouldn't do that this time.

The only noise I heard from inside was Wrinkly's faint murmur, "Oh, dearâ€¦I daresay I overwhelmed him with that last questionâ€¦"

I jumped off the steps again and walked away from the house, feeling like I could clear my head if I could just get away from things for a little while. More than anything, I wanted to go for a flight with Toothless, but I was worried that the Outcasts might spot us. I reluctantly stayed on the ground, trying to skirt around the village so I wouldn't have to speak to anyone. Toothless stayed beside me the whole time, nuzzling me with his nose and trying to figure out exactly what was wrong. He understood human speech enough to understand me when I spoke, but I had a theory about how far their understanding of humans actually went. I don't think he really understood what Wrinkly had been saying about me.

"I'm okay, bud," I assured him gently. "I justâ€¦" I sighed, reaching the edge of the forest and collapsing against a tree trunk, leaning my head back to stare up at the sky. "I don't want any more war, Toothless," I said in a very small voice. "I just want to have a home here again, and I want to remember whatever my brain doesn't want me to remember about my father, and Iâ€¦justâ€¦I don't want to be King!" I ended my rant forcefully, leaning back against the trunk again. "I just want everything to be normal again."

Toothless reached over and licked my cheek consolingly.

I offered him a tiny smile, grateful that he was still sticking around. "Thanks, bud." I patted his nose, but instantly moved my hand again; it appeared that he had something to tell me. He mimed licking my whole body, without actually doing so â€" for which I was grateful, because although Night Fury saliva has incredible healing

properties, it doesn't wash out and it certainly doesn't make a raw fish taste any better.

I stared at him for a second, unsure of what he meant before my eyes widened, and I actually laughed a little. "Oh, Toothless, that's not what Iâ€|okay, okay, I'll do it, I'll do it." I surrendered easily, deciding to follow him into the forest, as dragons had an incredible sense of direction and he could find the way.

He seemed proud that he had made me laugh just by suggesting that I take a bath, as I had said I needed to do just the previous night, because he was doing that odd little skip he always did whenever he was particularly happy, nudging me along. I wasn't familiar with the forest, but I wasn't uneasy, either; I wasn't near enough to any lake or river yet to smell it, but Toothless obviously could, and the ground beneath me quickly became muddy and damp.

The lake was just a clear pool of freshwater, but it would do for a wash. I gave his nose a grateful pat. He probably remembered me talking about needing a bath last night, and he wasn't connecting the dots as to what was upsetting me quite yet. Again, I had a theory about dragons â€| I didn't think they truly understood war, or the brutality of it. I took off my one boot and began undoing the straps of my prosthetic before hesitating, looking over at Toothless. "Did I ever wash after losing my leg?"

He nodded reassuringly, and I shrugged. He was here, the water was shallow. I wasn't terrified of water or anything, but after Halfdan and his friends back on Outcast Island had tried to drown me, I wasn't exactly ecstatic about it. I pulled off my leggings and unlaced my tunic, but as I ripped it off and slid into the rather cold water, I saw something out of the corner of my eye: a new scar on my arm. It shouldn't have surprised me. Alvin was always leaving scars, and he had probably just left me another right before he'd wiped my memory. I went to see what kind of weapon he had used before drawing back in shock, making a splash in the tiny pool.

Toothless was by my side in an instant, nuzzling my hair and looking to see what was wrong. He growled slightly when he saw the mark on my arm, but he gave no indication of what had happened. I realized I was shaking a little, making the words on my arm quiver back and forth. "Whatâ€|whyâ€|Toothless?" I glanced up at him uncertainly. "Whyâ€|what didâ€|I don't remember Alvin everâ€|"

Toothless shook his head just the tiniest bit, and I wasn't completely sure what he meant. Was he saying that he didn't remember Alvin doing it, either? If he didn't, then it must have been after Humongous handed me off to him, because Toothless wasn't with me that time, thank Odin.

Toothless crawled carefully into the water with me, being gentle so he wouldn't make a splash. He gave a screech and hopped out again, his eyes wide at how cold it was before steeling himself and crawling back in. I wanted to forget the stupid mark on my arm and just have a day with Toothless, but there was something there, something not quite right about it. Something told me that it wasn't Alvin who had done this to me.

Toothless shimmied up beside me, supporting me in the water so I didn't have to float there alone, but I patted him reassuringly. I

could feel the sand beneath my one foot, and that was calming enough that I wasn't afraid of going under, now that I understood how shallow it really was.

Toothless bent his head beneath the water right in front of me, and I could see tiny bubbles floating up to the surface. I smiled at his antics before realizing they were for my benefit; the water around me suddenly heated rapidly, and I sighed a little in satisfaction at the temperature. I moved my arm again, the mark catching my eye. What had I done, besides train Toothless? What had I done? What had I done to have Alvin carve 'traitor' into my skin?

20. Distance

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 20: Distance

**A/N: Hey, guys :D new chapter. I need to update Untold but ughhh no inspiration. I shall try. **

* * *

><p>It was a relief, above all, to be clean again, just to see my skin return to its normal color, to scrub away all the dirt. The water heated rapidly but cooled slowly, so Toothless didn't have to warm it up again until about twenty minutes later, after he had already splashed me purposely with the colder water twice and smirked when I yelped and glared at him for it.<p>

I sank back into the warmth with a satisfied sigh before glancing at my clothes, realizing I had been in the water for a long time. I was technically already clean, so I really should have just gotten out again. I crawled up onto the bank and Toothless followed, for which I was grateful because doing everything one-legged was a task that I just wasn't up to. I spotted the mark on my arm again as I leaned heavily on Toothless, working my legs into the leggings and reaching for my tunic and prosthetic. Where had it come from?

The question plagued me as I tugged the shirt over my head, laced it up, and started buckling my prosthetic on again. The design might have been complex to any other Viking, but, as I had spent a good bit of my life on Outcast Island working in the forge, it was fairly simple to me. I leaned against Toothless' side, settling myself in the grass as I strapped it back on. "Thanks, bud," I panted gratefully. Even with Toothless' help, dressing with only one leg was exhausting.

He licked my cheek to show his response and shook himself to get the water off. I knew enough to know that that's what he was doing and shielded myself with my hands just before he did. As I started tugging the vest on my shoulders, I rolled up my sleeve a bit, looking at the mark again before cutting my gaze to Toothless. "Should I even ask anyone about this?" I whispered, sinking down into the grass again. "What if they can't tell me how it happened? And I

don't know, but I don't like the feeling I get whenever I look at itâ€¦" I trailed off uncertainly.

Toothless crooned worriedly at me, wrapping me in a warm hug with his wings. I smiled as he pulled me against his black underbelly, warming me instantly after the goosebumps on my skin from the cold breeze. He nuzzled my hair with his nose, blowing the auburn strands awry and snuggled me closer before releasing me onto the grass. Although his hug didn't answer my question, it made me feel a bit better. I smiled up at him as I took to my feet again, patting his nose gratefully. "C'mon, bud. We'd better get back to the village now."

With a flush of shame, I remembered running away from Wrinkly and Dad. What were they thinking of me now? That I was weak? That I couldn't handle being King?

"Well, they've got a point there," I muttered, more to myself than to Toothless, though I was sure he heard. I guess I didn't really care if they thought I was too weak to be King. I didn't want to be King anyway. It was probably best for them to realize that I wasn't fit now, than to get all excited about it and be disappointed when it was too late and I'd already been crowned.

I frowned as the house came into view again, a lot sooner than I wanted it to. I didn't want to have to face them again, to come running back with my tail tucked between my legs, but the feeling of suffocation, of being utterly overwhelmed, was at least gone. "C'mon, bud," I mumbled to Toothless, jumping up the steps leading up to the back door and placing one hand upon the thick wood. "We might as well get it over with."

I pushed open the door and made my careful way inside, asking myself of the likelihood of being able to escape upstairs before I was spotted.

"Hiccup." My father must have heard my footsteps, because he turned from where he was tending the fire to look at me, dropping the poker. "I need to speak with you."

I dropped my gaze to the floor. "I'm sorry about running away, I justâ€¦I needed time, andâ€¦"

"No," he cut in swiftly. "I'm sorry. We overwhelmed you."

I looked at the two other chairs beside the fire and realized that they were empty. Wrinkly must have left. "Um, hey, I need to ask you something."

He raised a curious eyebrow, but did not rise from his chair, so I took a few steps closer. "I went into the forest and took a wash, but, wellâ€¦when I took my tunic off, I saw something kind of weird, and I was hoping you could tell me where I got it?" I hesitated on the point of rolling up my sleeve, but he looked rather curious, so I did.

Dad's face paled and he drew back the instant he saw the mark. "Iâ€¦umâ€¦"

"You know what happened." I couldn't have mistook his reaction; his gray eyes were wide with sudden, inexplicable fear. "Tell me, did

Alvin do this? And why?"

"Heâ€¦umâ€¦" Dad seemed to have found his voice. "Yesâ€¦he did that to you, I'mâ€¦I meanâ€¦he did it, because he was angry with you for traveling to Berk and discovering your true heritageâ€¦"

This didn't sound like the whole truth, but if he was removing some things to spare me the grisly details, I was grateful. I had a feeling that I didn't want to remember this. I winced in remembered pain when I gingerly touched the scar. "Hmmâ€¦"

Dad glanced quickly at me, and then away again, back towards the fire. "You sound upset."

"Angry that Alvin got more of my skin," I corrected. "So what's going on with you and Outcast Island? You still taking a dragon?"

He nodded. "If I can manage it. Would you know of any breeds that can hold my weight?"

"Um, you could try a really tough Gronckle, or you and Gobber could take a Zippleback, but the Zipplebacks are really only supposed to be for slight ridersâ€¦I don't think you fit the billâ€¦Wrinkly said a Thunderdrumâ€¦I've studied the Thunderdrum before, it could workâ€¦"

He raised his eyebrows, watching me.

"I'm still not a good teacher," I insisted, hating the uneasiness in my gut when I thought about being alone with this man. "But from what I remember, Astrid is, she taught me how to ice skate, so you should probably ask herâ€¦"

"But the only dragon she's ever trained is a Deadly Nadder, and I'm sure you'll get the work done quicker," Dad replied stubbornly. "And right now, Hiccup, speed is essential."

I sank into the vacated chair in front of the fire with a sigh, knowing there was no way to refuse. "If you insist on going through with this, I'll teach you everything I can."

"Thank you." His voice was surprisingly stiff and formal, and I realized then that it was mimicking mine. I had been uneasy around him since I came, and I couldn't pinpoint why, and I must have been formal with him, too.

The thought of the distance between us wasn't upsetting to me; I remembered flashes of him being kind to me, but not enough to realize that I'd lost anything. I sighed dispiritedly, returning my gaze to the fire. "I'll try and find a good breed for you, Dad."

His gray eyes snapped up to mine. "What did you call me?"

"Sir," I corrected myself instantly, uncomfortably aware that his gaze was hard and cold and sad. "I'm sorry, sir, I, umâ€¦I forgot myself."

"No, no, it's alright," he insisted gently, rising from his chair and kneeling in front of mine, taking my hand. The fire hissed and sputtered, but he didn't glance back at it. "I justâ€¦you've never

called me that before."

"I'll stop," I mumbled as I flushed. "I didn't realize it bothered you, I justâ€¦don't know what else to call you."

"No, I just said it was fine, I'm only surprised. I didn't expect you to accept me so quickly is all."

I wanted to tell him that I didn't accept him. I was only calling him that because I didn't know what else to call him. 'Stoick' just sounded too personal, too familiar. And 'chief' just didn't feel right. But I could tell that saying these things would only upset him, so I just smiled and said, "Of course."

21. Be Careful

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 21: Be Careful

A/N: **SURPRISE**

Yes, this is the surprise. Updating all of my eighteen in-progress fics at once. It was pretty crazy, but I did it, and it's here, and good day to you all! I had tons of fun doing this, so I hope you guys have tons of fun reading this!

**Anyway, BLAEGGHHGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGG LET'S PRETEND THIS CHAPTER DOES NOT EXIST OKAY GOD IT'S PURE FILLERRRRRRR **

* * *

><p>The purple Nadder started pining for Eret, watching the skies in worry as if expecting the man to hurtle suddenly down from the clouds and land on Berk's shores. I could tell that the dragon wanted to go after him, and I didn't protest; it would take us a few days to find a breed suitable for Dad, to train the dragon, teach him how to ride, and get everything settled and ready for his departure. I wanted Eret back just as much as the Nadder did, and nobody else knew the dragon personally; the absence went unnoticed.<p>

According to Fishlegs, they had a book on all the different dragon breeds, a fact that surprised me. An island that killed dragons wouldn't have researched the different types; at least, that's what I thought. When he reluctantly handed it off to me (he didn't seem to want to let it go long enough for me to take it) I flipped it open and felt a wrenching in my gut that had nothing to do with the chicken I had just eaten.

There were detailed descriptions of these dragons, their weaknesses, their strengths, ways to kill them and weapons that worked best against them. The sight made me feel sick and angry, made me want to throw the book in the ocean. Yet the pages had useful information scrawled upon them, information that even I hadn't previously discovered. Dad and I spent the time reading up on the different

breeds, debating which one would be best for him to take to Outcast Island. Toothless stayed close by my chair, seemingly on edge and slightly jumpy, but for what reason, he wouldn't say.

"You know, I've never even heard of some of these breeds," I said thoughtfully as I turned the page. "I've heard of the Whispering Death, but never the Screaming Death. And I've never even seen a Timberjack or a Typhoomerang."

Dad gave me an odd look. "I'd expect you to know all of these breeds, and beyond, Hiccup. You are an expert on dragons, aren't you?"

I flushed, glancing back down at the page. "Honestly, I'm not even close. I mean, there are a few breeds that I've met that are missing from here â€" Speed Stingers and Seadragonus Giganticus Maximusâ€"Flightmares, that's also a good breed, but they're incredibly rare and our chances of catching and taming one of them in a couple days are very slim. It took me months to build a bond with a Flightmare â€" they love their freedom too much to feel loyalty towards humans or other dragon species."

Dad didn't say anything, and I didn't get to see his expression; I had started reading the page I'd landed on, and it turned out to be pretty interesting. "The Thunderdrum does sound like a pretty good bet, but they're a bit like Flightmares, honestly, and they prefer water to land or air. We could try a Seashocker, but they're not very trustworthy when it comes to serious situations, they like pranks more than missions, most of them."

"What about the Skrill?" Dad ventured, gesturing to the dragon riding a thunderbolt up on the corner of the page.

"They, um, I don't know if they could handle your weight, either, no offense. Also, they ride lightning bolts. If you want to be riding an electric current instead of a dragon the whole way to Outcast Island, then have at it. I think a Thunderdrum or a Scauldron is your best bet right now, but a Thunderdrum is best. Scauldrons are slow fliers and they can only be in the air for about an hour at a time before they have to go underwater again. So, unless you could handle being randomly submerged in the oceanâ€"|"

He chuckled, even though I wasn't joking. "A Thunderdrum it is, then!"

"Are there even any around this island?"

"Plenty," he nodded, taking the book from my hands and closing it gently, setting it aside. "As far as we know, they seem to enjoy colder temperatures, because we get loads of them every winter. Summer's nearly on the island, so there won't be quite as manyâ€"|"

I wasn't even sure that a Thunderdrum was the best bet, by that point. What were we going to do? Throw raw fish in the water and hope the dragon came up? Of course, I knew that seadragons rarely ever ate fish; they played with the fish, as casually as if they were both the same species, and they were horribly offended if you ever expected them to eat it.

I wasn't even certain what the Thunderdrum ate, but I knew it was

some type of meat, and they liked it bloody. This was not going to be pretty.

* * *

><p>I was right. It wasn't pretty. In fact, it was so not pretty that I couldn't even decide what the un-prettiest part was. It was a dead tie between Gobber insisting that Thunderdrums came up only if you disturbed them, and insisting on banging an axe upon a shield for several long minutes, resulting only in a very annoyed Scauldron that tried to burn him with a mouthful of boiling water; me discovering that Thunderdrums, unlike land-dragons, did not like dragon nip; or Dad, in the end, losing his head completely and throwing a net over the Thunderdrum until we were safely back on dry land.

Turned out, there was something called the "Kill Ring" on Berk, and that was where we ended up taking the Thunderdrum, depositing him in one of the cages.

"Sorry," I apologized guiltily as we shut the door on him and pulled out the Dragon Book once again, to look up everything we could about Thunderdrums.

There wasn't really much useful information within the pages about training a dragon, actually, so I made the executive decision that hands-on training would help.

"Are you sure?" Gobber pressed.

"I know what I'm doing," I assured him, walking over to the door of the cage and preparing to unlatch it.

"That's what you said about the dragon nip," Gobber quipped.

I glared at him. "I know what I'm doing now," I emphasized, unlocking the cage door.

The Thunderdrum sprang out, roaring angrily at us, his mouth open, his teeth bared. I stayed where I was, staring him down, waiting for his rage to subside. He seemed particularly agitated about Dad, turning his eyes upon him.

"Hey, it's okay." I bent down so I was eye level with the dragon, whispering soothingly, trying to talk quietly, but also make myself heard over his roaring.

"Be careful." Dad cautioned quietly.

22. Pawns and Kings

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 22: Pawns and Kings

****A/N: Okay. I owe you guys all a huge apology. ****

****I AM SO SORRY FOR IGNORING THIS STORY FOR A MONTH LIKE LEGIT I SHOULD NOT HAVE DONE THAT I AM SORRY DDDDDDDDD: Well, I hope you can forgive me, and we can look forward to a better place with this story. I finally wrote myself out of the hole that I wrote myself into. It should be moving quicker now, and ooh, is this Hiccup/Stoick bonding I sense? Yes, I believe it is.****

****We shall have to see, though :D you just never know when something might happen, to come along and screw everything up
LIKEASUDDENFLASHBACKTOACERTAINBRANDINGAHAHAHAHA ****

****Anyway. Oh, also, I'm doing Nano Wrimo again this year, so as November approaches, my updates should be a lot less frequent.****

****And now we've got Eret having some angst. It was fun xD ****

*** * ***

><p>It was easier than I thought it would be, to calm the Thunderdrum, and relax him enough to allow me to touch him. Getting him and Dad to bond, however, definitely appeared to be a problem that I wasn't ready for.<p>

Though the dragon had forgiven me for my mishap with the nip, it seemed that the banging-the-axe-on-the-shield incident and the throwing-the-net-over-him incident wasn't completely forgotten, because the creature seemed wary of Gobber and Dad.

"No, it's okay, buddy," I coaxed, but I couldn't blame the guy; I felt uncomfortable around him too, and he was my father. Apparently. It was still hard to wrap my mind around that, but I felt that if I just called him 'Dad' long enough, and quit thinking of Alvin as my father, then I'd eventually get used to it.

The Thunderdrum eyed me suspiciously for a second, his yellow gaze boring into mine, but at last he released the dragon equivalent of a deep sigh, and stretched out his neck to allow Dad to touch his nose.

"Be gentle," I cautioned. "Just be gentle, Dad, take it slowâ€¦"

He didn't speak, but I think his concentration was fixed solely on the dragon in front of him. He stretched out a huge, shaking hand, and cool blue scales met warm flesh. There was a second of silence, barely a heartbeat, and I exhaled. I heard my dad exhale, too, and I heard Gobber exhale, and even the dragon seemed to let out a breath, as if we'd all been holding ours and hadn't realized it until that very moment.

A shadow of a smile crossed my dad's face, and the pressure in my chest eased very slightly when I saw this. He looked so much more approachable with a smile, and I hadn't realized it yet, because he hadn't smiled around me in the two days that I had been here. The dragon seemed kind of moved by what had just transpired as well, but not as much as anyone else, because he pulled away and gave me a kind of 'you owe me' look.

I smiled apologetically, knowing I had little time to make it up to him. The Thunderdrum turned his gaze on Gobber, then, and I glanced hopefully at the blacksmith.

To his credit, the blonde did not balk at the idea of laying a peaceful hand upon an enemy, which made me wonder if he had done it once before. His real hand didn't shake, as Stoick's had done; he just pressed a hand to the dragon's nose, and the Thunderdrum seemed to like the surprisingly gentle-looking touch.

I jumped when a hand found my shoulder and my gut tightened a little when I spotted my dad staring down at me with unmistakable pride in his eyes. "You did a fantastic job, Hiccup."

"Thank you," I replied awkwardly, scuffing the toes of my boot against the arena floor. "Erâ€¦you did, too."

He frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Well, I know that it can be hard, to trust a dragon to the point where you'll touch him," I explained, feeling stupider and stupider by the second.

He smiled slightly, ruffling my hair in a way that felt familiar and oddly, nice. My distrust shrank instantly back at his touch, but I didn't. I surprised myself by leaning into it, savoring it. When he took his hand away again, the distrust didn't come calling back.

"Alright." I broke away from his side at last, walking back over to the Thunderdrum and resting a hand on his snout, silently thanking him for being so patient with me. "We still have a long way to go if this dragon is going to fly you guys to Outcast Island."

* * *

><p>I fell asleep instantly that night, the exhaustion of the day overwhelming me. It had been a long day of bonding with the Thunderdrum, and helping Dad and Gobber do the same, not to mention that we couldn't really practice flying. Dad had insisted that it wasn't a good idea for anybody to be seen flying dragons above the island of Berk, saying that surely Alvin would have a couple people watching, and maybe he'd assume it was Toothless, and try to shoot him down.<p>

No matter how many flaws I pointed out in this plan, including a memorable ten minutes where I'd shouted that _for Thor's sake, Alvin already knows I'm on Berk, what's all this secrecy about?!_

Dad hadn't exactly been thrilled when I'd remembered myself, and stopped yelling, but he hadn't smacked me across the face, as I'd been expecting. All in all, the only word I could think to use to describe the day was 'exhausting'.

But my dreams were worse still.

I was somewhere very dark, the absolute blackness so thick that I couldn't see anything. No light penetrated the darkness, but sounds from my left and right let me know that within the gloom, somebody else lurked. The darkness was not normal darkness; no matter how long

I sat there, my eyes didn't adjust. They did, however, water pretty badly when there was a creaking sound from up above, and a door opened at the very top of the blackness, spilling light, chasing away the darkness.

The man across from me gasped, his own eyes filling with tears from the unexpected light. His eyes were familiar: unflinching, unbending, golden.

Alvin the Treacherous dropped down into that darkness, and I could see the white-haired woman at the top, but she didn't descend.

Alvin smiled pleasantly, but Eret's face and body were taut with rage.

"What do you want from me now?"

"I am giving you one last chance to answer your question," Alvin replied, sauntering in a relaxed fashion over to the other man, his smile as wide and fake as a hammerhead shark's. He reached Eret's side and, in a second, had grabbed the man up by the throat, slamming him into the wall behind. "What do you know about the King of the Wilderwest?"

Eret's face was red and swiftly turning purple from lack of oxygen. His hands, larger than mine but smaller than the ones that held him there, clawed uselessly at Alvin's hairy wrists. He did not speak, but perhaps he couldn't; and maybe Alvin realized this, too, for he let the man drop back to the ground.

"I feel it prudent to warn you," the chief's eyes glittered with menace as he spoke, "withholding information will not help anyone. Not Hiccup, and definitely not you. So why don't you hand over the pages you are concealing?"

"I don't have them!" Eret's voice was choked and weak from the ragged breaths he was frantically drawing, but he still managed to sound defiant as well. "They were lost long ago!"

"But you know where they are?"

Eret said nothing.

Above them, the witch cackled, but neither man took notice of her. Alvin knelt down to Eret's level, speaking in a swift, cajoling voice. "Think of it. You need only tell me what the pages you have hidden say, and you can go free. These chains will be unlocked, you will."

"Be allowed to skip off, home free, with valuable knowledge of the King of the Wilderwest in my hands?" Eret suggested sarcastically. "I think not. You'd kill me the second I told you what you wanted to know."

"If you're doing this to protect yourself, it is a smart move indeed," Alvin sounded amused now. "But I know you, Eret." He uttered the man's name as if it was an insult. "I know your weakness. And your weakness has fallen. The king has fallen now, I assure you."

Eret's face paled, but his golden eyes stayed narrowed with anger. He spoke in the same manner Alvin had, as if in code. "The pawn can't capture the king."

Alvin's hand was suddenly up in the air, and before I even knew what was happening, he had smacked Eret across the face. The man didn't cry out; his glare only intensified, and he took the blow squarely, without flinching.

"Here is something to think about, Eret â€" what do we call those who are beneath the pawns?"

23. Safe House

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 23: Safe House

**A/N: Guys, I am so sorry D: I am so so so so so so so so sorry that I took FOREVER to update, and then when I did I took it back down. See, problem was, I kind of posted it without thinking about it and there was A HUGE plot hole. Like, I couldn't even Spackle it, that's how bad it was :P but I think this version is better, anyway. And it's really long, too :D **

* * *

><p>When I awoke, my heart was pounding wildly in my chest, uncomfortably fast.<p>

I sat upright in the bed, kicking the blankets off and stumbling over to the window, looking down on the village of Berk. Dawn was only just breaking over the horizon, spilling pink and gold light everywhere, the sky bright and alive with colors. The early morning air felt good on my too-warm face, so I put both hands on the sill and leaned a little farther out, gulping down each breath as if it would be my last.

I slowly inhaled again, my mind flitting back to my dream. Eret was somewhere out there, on Outcast Island, being hurt because of me. Because he wouldn't give Alvin helpful information about the King of the Wilderwest. I barely knew him, and his protection of me was surprising. He barely knew me, and yet he was getting hurt because he wouldn't hurt me. I swallowed, turning away from the window. Dad probably wouldn't be up yet, and the rest of the village was eerily silent and still â€" I was guessing nobody was up much before sunrise. I swung open my bedroom door and started walking down the stairs, surprised to hear voices coming from the kitchen.

I skipped the last couple of steps to reach the downstairs rooms faster, and stumbled a little over my prosthetic. Toothless swung out to catch me before I hit the ground, and I smiled gratefully at him before I entered the kitchen. Gobber and Dad both instantly fell silent when I walked in. I hesitantly took a seat at the table, flicking my eyes nervously between the two men. "What's going

on?"

"We're leaving tonight," Dad responded, shoving a plate of eggs in my direction without looking at me.

"For Outcast Island?"

He nodded gravely, handing me a fork. "Eat."

"Umâ€¦" I glanced down at the plate. "Do you think that when you go to Outcast Island could you, umâ€¦could you please find Eret and bring him back with you?"

"I thought you said he lived in a man-eating garden," Gobber interrupted.

"He doesn't live in the garden, he lives in the big tree behind it. And I saw him tonight. In my dream. He wasâ€¦he was with Alvin." I put my fork down and drew a deep breath. "So, Dadâ€¦please find him."

"Okay, wait," Dad held up a hand. "Didn't this man threaten you with death?"

"Yesâ€¦" I admitted slowly. "But, um, he didn't actually go through with it!" I added brightly. "And he's really nice, actually, once you get past the garden and threat of violent death by bloody knife."

Gobber and Dad exchanged glances.

"Look, please?" I pushed the plate away. "If Eret hadn't done what he had for me, I wouldn't be sitting here discussing it with you guys."

I knew I had scored a point by the look on Dad's face. He sighed, and his gray eyes softened. "Okay. Okay, if he means that much to you, I will try my best."

I smiled a little, relieved that I had won. I knew the purple Nadder had gone after him, too, but I didn't like the odds of one dragon against a whole island full of Outcasts. "Thank you, Dad."

"Yeah, yeah," he muttered. "And eat, for Thor's sake, Hiccup, even if it's just a bite."

I obediently picked up my fork and speared an egg with it, putting it quickly in my mouth. "There, can I be done now?"

Gobber chuckled. Dad glared at him to silence him.

"Also," Dad added, turning back to face me, "while we're gone, I want you and the rest of the village to consider yourselves on dragon lockdown."

"Dragon lockdown?" I questioned, pushing the plate away for the second time.

"It's what you've been doing for the past day and a half â€" just don't fly any of the dragons, and nobody is to leave Berk while we're

gone. Alvin is just waiting to ambush us, especially you, and we don't want to make it too easy for him."

"But how will we defend the island if we don't use our dragons?" I asked, putting down the fork. "That's our best advantage over Alvin, we have to use it all we can!"

"If Alvin tries to attack â€" and the likelihood of that happening isn't high, considering he probably doesn't want to chance it so soon â€" then the villagers will defend the island using their dragons."

"Alright, then," I patted Toothless' head, scratching him between the horns. "Then we'd better be ready, I guess?"

"You won't be defending the island," Dad replied, as if I was being stupid. "Alvin's looking for you, Hiccup â€" he doesn't care about anyone else. Do you think I'm stupid enough to let you fight on the front lines, right under his nose?"

"Let me?" I pushed my chair back so quickly that it wobbled as I stood. "You can't restrict me from doing anything!"

"Yes, I canâ€"

"And if Alvin really doesn't care about anyone else, then he'll be willing to kill a boatload of people just to get to me! I can't have that happen! If he attacks, I should be out there defending the island with the rest of them! If Alvin brings war to Berk, then that's my fault!"

"But it's my responsibility to protect you! You're not making it easy!" Dad slammed his fist down on the table as he spoke and I jumped slightly, startled out of our argument by the loud noise. "I want you to be kept in a safe place, away from the village," he continued, in a much calmer voice. "Because if Alvin attacks, the first place he'll look is here. We have to be one step ahead of him."

I studied the table for a long second, running a finger over the wooden top. "Okay," I didn't like it, but I didn't want to push him any further, either. "Okay, I'm sorry." I straightened the chair that I had knocked over just a few minutes ago, and pushed it closer to the table. "We'd better get going then, I guess. If you and Gobber are leaving tonight, there's still a lot you'll need to know before you're ready to fly all the way to Outcast Island."

Dad sighed and stood from his chair, coming around the side of the table so he stood in front of me. "Hiccup, please don't take what I said the wrong way. I'm not trying to hurt you; I'm trying to protect you."

"Iâ€|I know," I drew a deep breath as I slipped past him to get to the living room.

"Hiccup." He grabbed onto my sleeve to prevent me from leaving the kitchen, and Gobber sidled right past us.

I couldn't tear my eyes off his hand, where it rested on my shirt, because I wanted to make him let go of me. "What?"

"Iâ€| " He looked away for a second, and then looked back at me.
"C'mon. We'd better get going, like you said."

"Yeah," I nodded, both relieved and disappointed in equal measure. Relieved because he'd finally let go of me, but disappointed because he'd obviously had something to say, and now he wasn't saying it.

He followed Gobber into the living room, and I followed him.

The whole of Berk felt a little like a ghost town, with everyone else still being asleep. Well, everyone except Helga, who had stepped out to check on her plants, and waved to us absentmindedly as we went by. Her face stirred something in my memory, and I remembered her suddenly as the woman who I'd helped with a Zippleback. I waved to her as we passed, and Dad looked over to see who I was waving to.

"So, where exactly am I going to be staying, if I'm not to stay in the house?" I asked as we walked, raising an eyebrow as I spoke.

"Oh." Dad looked a little like he hadn't thought of that, but then he nodded at a distant, gloomy-looking house on the hilltop. "There's where you'll be staying. It's a little dark and a bit small, but it should work â€" you can hear anyone coming for miles, and there are windows enough on all sides to see everything at once. It's an ideal safe house, and you'll have Toothless and a guardâ€"

"A guard?" I interrupted.

"A guard?" Gobber repeated, as surprised as I was. "I would have thought you'd have given up on trying to keep him guarded after that last fiasco with Humongous."

I swallowed when the Hero's name left Gobber's lips, even though I knew he probably didn't even remember what had happened to him, and wasn't trying to upset me.

Dad frowned at Gobber's words. "It isn't some shady Hero-for-Hire this time, I promise. It's just the kids."

"Kids?"

Dad frowned at me this time â€" maybe I sounded more surprised than the situation warranted. "Yes, the kids. I don't enjoy having kids only a little older than you fighting on the front line, either, but they protest up a storm whenever I try to keep them away from the fighting. The best way to keep them away from the front lines while also making them feel like they're doing something important is to make them protectors. They and Toothless will be the final ring of defense around you, so even if Alvin breaks through the main lines and reaches your safe house, expecting you to have only your Night Fury, he'll get a surprise."

"Dad, you can't do that!"

He looked surprised. "Why not?"

"You can't ask these kids to die for me, it's not right! I don't care

if you put me in a safe house, but you can't ask other people to die for me, too."

"They'll have their dragons," Dad reasoned.

"I don't care. I can't ask that of them."

"Honestly, Hiccup, Berk is filled with amazing fighters. It's very unlikely that Alvin would break through the main lines, not to mention highly unlikely that he will attack at all. These are all measures taken to be cautious, not because he's actually planning to attack. More likely than not, the kids won't even be doing any actual fighting. They'll be okay, you'll see."

I still didn't really like it, but I knew there was no talking him out of it. The best thing I could hope for right now was that Alvin wouldn't attack and, if he did, which seemed very likely to me, whatever Dad said, then I would have to ignore the chief's orders and go out to fight with Toothless. Humongous was gone, and Eret could very well be going the same way. I couldn't ask anyone else to die for me.

24. Protective

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 24: Protective

**A/N: Hi guys :) I'm back with a new chapter already! I hope you enjoy, and please leave a review on your way out :3 I'm almost 200, soooooooo :3 please? **

* * *

><p>Though nobody knew why Dad was leaving, where he was going, or even what he leaving for, everyone seemed to know that at least, he was leaving. And, as a result, plenty of people showed up wherever Dad was that day, the men shaking his hand and wishing him good luck and a nice strong wind, the women asking him to be safe. Mostly, though, everyone just wanted to make sure that all was well.<p>

Dad took all the well-wishers with grace, nodding politely at them and smiling, attempting to extricate himself without being rude. Gobber, however, had no such qualms, and often yelled insultingly at the people of Berk that the chief had a ton of work to do, and he didn't want to be bothered anymore.

Since so few people knew where they were going, Dad made sure to ask them to please not show up as he was leaving â€" he didn't want a raucous crowd on the beach, possibly attracting the attention of nearby Outcast boats.

So, it was a small group and lonely farewell, just me and Toothless and Wrinkly standing on the beach. I patted the Thunderdrum's nose in gratitude as Gobber jumped cheerfully and readily onto his

back.

Dad, however, did not.

He knelt down on the sand in front of me, so we were eye level, and then took my chin in his huge hands. "Look after yourself, Hiccup. Be safe."

I nodded uncertainly, as much as I could nod with him holding my chin. He swept me up into a hug, but it wasn't as rough as I'd expected it to be — it was surprisingly gentle, as gentle as it had been the day I'd returned.

Dad pulled away from me and studied my face for a second before taking to his feet and turning to Wrinkly. "Make sure he takes care of himself."

Wrinkly nodded.

"I'm right here," I muttered, annoyed.

Dad ignored me. "Make sure he actually stays in the safe house."

Wrinkly gave me an apologetic look.

"And third," Dad continued sternly, "on no account are you to terrify him by telling him visions of his future. Got it?"

My grandfather had the grace to look abashed, but he also said, "What if he's going to die in three weeks or something? Don't you think he'd want a warning?"

Dad's gray eyes lost all their softness, narrowing to slits. "Hiccup's not going to die," he snapped, putting a hand on my shoulder and squeezing so hard that it hurt. "Not on my watch. And not on Toothless'."

The aforesaid Night Fury, who had been acting a little strange around Dad all day, now nodded at him and fanned his wings out behind me, the universal dragon symbol for protection and friendship.

"Don't worry," I assured Dad, scratching Toothless under the chin and making him coo, "with Toothless on my case, I won't be allowed to die."

He didn't look very reassured, but he consented to climbing on the Thunderdrum and the three took off into the night, the dragon firstly skimming the waves and then rising up, higher and higher, through the wispy nighttime clouds and out of sight.

* * *

><p>I didn't have any strange dreams that night, thank Thor. It was a dreamless, relaxed sleep, but when I awoke, it was to a pounding on my bedroom door. Thinking of Toothless, thinking maybe he wanted to go flying, I glanced instinctively at the side of the bed, but my dragon was curled up, still sleeping soundly.<p>

The pounding grew louder and I groaned, conceding defeat and rising

from the bed, stumbling sleepily over to the door and opening it.

"Stoick said we were supposed to be your guard," a dark-haired boy, much bigger and taller than I was, spoke in a cool, self-assured voice.

I blinked, struggling to remember his name. Something with an S, I thought?

"Snotlout?" I tilted my head to the side, testing the name out. That sounded about right.

The boy snorted. "Yeah, no duh."

Astrid, the blonde girl, socked him, mouthing something I didn't catch, and he flushed a deep pink.

"Sorry," he muttered to me resentfully. "I forgot that you didn't remember anything."

"I remember some things," I corrected, wrinkling my brow and trying to remember something about the boy in front of me, this complete stranger whose name I barely knew. "You're my cousin, right?" I brightened at remembering this fact.

Snotlout looked happier, too. "Yeah!"

"Okay, boys, we can play catch-up later," Astrid quipped, putting a hand on her hip. "The main point is, Hiccup, aren't you supposed to be in the safe house?"

"Umâ€¦" It was my turn to flush. "Well, a safe house can't be much different from here."

Astrid narrowed her pretty blue eyes. "Actually, it is. It was set up as a place of protection, and it's an ideal hideout."

I scowled at the ground, unable to do so at her. "Fine, then. Whatever. Let's go, Toothless, buddy, c'mon."

The dragon sat upright, looking cheerfully around. He must have been awake, and listening to us all along.

I followed the kids downstairs, half-hoping none of them would talk to me, but my wishes were pretty much ignored when a kid with waist-length blonde hair and grungy gray clothing slowed his pace to match mine and smiled hopefully at me. "So, what do you remember about me, Hiccup?"

Luckily, Astrid bailed me out, stopping so suddenly at the front door that Snotlout plowed into her. She glared at him before turning her flashing eyes to us. "Keep up, you two," she chastised. "Stoick will have our heads if we lose Hiccup."

I blushed, but instantly forgot my embarrassment as she opened the front door, revealing four dragons, all headed straight for their riders. They had clearly been dozing in the early morning sun, but the instant the door opened, they were up again. A beautiful, pale blue Nadder stopped by Astrid, greeting her with a nuzzle and a

large, fang-filled grin. A red Monstrous Nightmare bowled Snotlout over, trampling him more than hugging him, really, though Snotlout seemed to enjoy it all the same. A green Zippleback followed in the Nightmare's wake, a head greeting the long-haired blonde, and then his twin sister, a girl with two long braids. A yellow-brown Gronckle took to her wings and picked the husky blonde boy up on his nose, licking and hugging him.

The Nadder lowered her head to allow Astrid to climb on, but the blonde girl just looked pained. "I'm sorry, Stormfly," she apologized, "but we really can't fly today. Stoick's orders were strict and clear: no flights until everything has blown over."

Stormfly, if that was indeed her name, seemed a little disappointed at first, but got over it pretty quickly, just cantering happily around her rider. Astrid smiled before beginning to lead the rest of us to the safe house, up the crest of a great hill.

"It's just a little farther!" She called cajolingly, having already reached it herself.

"I hate her," Snotlout grumbled, panting, "I hate her and her athleticism."

When we reached the house ourselves, Astrid pushed the door open and the six of us, plus our five dragons, trooped inside.

It was a fairly clean, simple, one-room wooden hut with a wraparound porch and a back door at the other end of the room. The room was largely unfurnished, just a metal poker to tend the fire and a long, low wooden bench built into the wall.

The six of us exchanged glances, and shrugged. Astrid was watching me kind of warily, like she thought I was going to insist that this wasn't good enough for me, or whatever. These were better living quarters than an Outcast cell, that was for sure. I just shrugged at her, too, and sat down on the floor, Toothless instantly curling up beside me, wrapping his tail protectively around me.

Safe house, sweet safe house, I guess.

25. Tension

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 25: Tension

**A/N: Before we go any farther, I promise that this is the LAST filler chapter. Well, it's not really filler, it's necessary, but it sure is boring xP the point is, action will be happening SOON, at least, and so next chapter will not be a total waste and bore, like this one was. Well, I guess it wasn't that bad, but it was awful to write xP Anyway, whoa! I think this chapter pushes forty-two k! :D And the story's barely even started yet. Oh, no, it's not even

starteddddd :D I was rewatching Defenders of Berk today, BTW, because yes I spent my Thanksgiving eating and making fun of DoB, because DoB was so lame xD like it was good in parts, but mostly it was lame xD anyway, I watcheddddd Live and Let Fly and omg Iron Gronckle xD I kept laughing at that scene where Hiccup is dangling upside down from Meatlug and Fishlegs is trying to get him off xD cuties :3 and also I'd really like to introduce Dagur as an antagonist for this story one day. "Howl with me - it feels good" xD xD xD xD No but seriously. However, I think Hiccup's got enough on his plate right now just managing Alvin and the witch. Maybe in Untold, perhaps? And later, because I'm lazy :P **

* * *

><p>The day passed uneventfully. Snotlout got so bored standing guard that he managed to convince everyone to duck inside the house, and he started up the most ridiculous games to keep us occupied.<p>

His suggestions of playing Spin the Mead Mug, however, were roundly rejected, with Astrid elbowing him in the gut and Fishlegs calculating the ratio of girls to boys, and how we didn't have even numbers of both sex.

That night, everyone seemed to realize that there were no beds, but this didn't bother me â€" Toothless and I just looked at each other and shrugged. We didn't mind sleeping together, to be honest â€" we'd done it so often before. I settled myself against his back, and he wrapped his tail protectively around me, cuddling me closer and blanketing me with a wing.

Snotlout, in a surprising show of respectful politeness, volunteered to sleep on the floor so the girls could have the bench, even if there wasn't much difference between a wooden floor and a wooden bench. The gray-clothed blonde, Tuffnut, I think Snotlout called him, grumbled about this quite a bit, but eventually gave up and curled up on the floor a little ways away from me. A husky blonde boy called Fishlegs gave his Gronckle a quick hug before settling down, too.

Snotlout sat up for quite a bit of time, a little ways away from me, and though the girls were already laying down on their bench, I could see Astrid's blue eyes, wide open in the dark. I watched them for a little while, certain that I wouldn't be able to sleep, and that I would lie awake with them, but almost the instant I thought this I started drifting off.

My dreams that night weren't bad. They were actually kind of nice. They were mostly just a lot of random images cobbled together, like Snotlout biffing me on the shoulder, his mouth forming the word 'cousin', and Astrid clinging to my waist as we rode on Toothless into the sky. I didn't know if these were memories or not, but that hardly mattered; the next second, I was drifting slowly into another dream, where my cheek was pressed against something warm and soft. I was laying down, but I wasn't in a bed, and it wasn't Toothless I slept against â€" I couldn't open my eyes to figure out who it was.

But that didn't really matter, either. Everything was silent and still, nothing but the sound of my breathing and the person above me. Neither of us even moved, in all that time, and when I woke up to

sunlight streaming in through the window, I was embarrassed to find that there were tears in my eyes. I brushed them quickly away, relieved to find that none of the others were awake yet.

Toothless opened one eye when he registered the absence of my weight against his back, and when he saw I was awake he gave me a good morning lick and nuzzle, as was custom with us.

I smiled at him, but I wiped the saliva off my face, taking to my feet and heading outside, to the back porch. When I reached the porch, I realized it was a beautiful morning, the sky blue and clear, the sun blindingly bright. I leaned out on the creaky wooden porch railing, drawing in deep breaths of early morning air as Toothless followed me out the still open back door.

He leaned against my hip, a reminder that he was there if I needed him. I smiled, scratching his head and making him purr as noises from inside warned me that the others were stirring now, too.

A couple of the teens lamented about the sun being too bright, and all was silent for a couple minutes. Astrid said something quietly, something I didn't catch, and the back door opened wide. Snotlout wandered out onto the porch with me, rolling up the sleeves of his tan shirt and leaning his elbows on the railing, looking out at the morning.

We stood there for a long moment, neither of us speaking, in companionable silence, but Snotlout broke it suddenly.

"Astrid thinks the Outcasts are going to attack today."

My stomach gave a jolt, but I tried to keep my voice calm. "Really? And what do you think?"

He shrugged. "I think that they're gonna attack when they're gonna attack, and the best we can do is keep fighting regardless of what they try to do to us."

I glanced at him for a second before returning my gaze to the sky, the trees of Raven's Point Forest distantly whispering and sighing in the breeze. "I guess you're right."

"Stoick should be back later today, but until then, Astrid might be a little wound," Snotlout shrugged. "Just a warning."

But Dad wasn't back. Not when Tuffnut started complaining of being hungry. Not when Snotlout pulled out a hand mirror and amused himself with making our dragons chase the light. Not when Astrid gave him a disgusted look and demanded to know why he kept a mirror in his sleeve. Not when he began stammering out embarrassed explanations, distracted, and allowed Toothless to pounce on the light.

Not even when the sun started going down again, and we all settled down for sleep, as it would be too dark to do anything else.

"Shouldn't they be back by now?" I whispered, looking out the window, as the final flash of ruby from the setting sun flashed through the windows.

Astrid's voice was surprisingly gentle. "They'll be okay, Hiccup. Maybe they just got held up or something."

I tried to allay my worries, but that night, I had more dreams. More memories. At least these were of the other kids, and I could actually remember these things happening. Mostly it was stupid stuff, like Snotlout daring the husky blonde boy, Fishlegs, to tell Dad that his braids looked lovely, but justâ€¦stuff. And we were all doing things together, no matter what they were.

But it quickly changed into the dream I had had last night, where I was lying against somebody, listening to each other's breathing and feeling them stroking my hair. I still wasn't sure who it was, but I felt safe, and I felt loved just by being close to them. I wasn't crying or even close to it when I awoke this time, which was really nice, seeing as everybody else was already awake by now. Snotlout and Astrid were both outside, patrolling the front of the house, and Tuffnut and his twin sister were both bickering about something or other. Fishlegs mostly just looked scared.

I sat up, trying to flatten my auburn hair. "What's going on?"

"Stoick and Gobber aren't back," Fishlegs explained nervously. "And they were supposed to be back by now!"

The moment I heard my real dad's name, my mind jumped to the dream I'd had, sleeping against somebody who loved me more than I could tell. Had that been my dad? I wondered, beginning to feel slightly awkward. I couldn't remember ever feeling that loved, I just felt that way in the dream. I looked down at my hands, clenched into fists in my lap.

Snotlout peeked inside at us, to see Fishlegs playing with his hands nervously, and me just sitting there staring at mine. I glanced up at him once before looking back down at my lap, so when he spoke, sounding much closer than before, I jumped slightly.

"Hey."

I looked up, and there he was, kneeling next to me and Toothless.

"They'll come back," he said gently. "I know them. Stoick is one of the best Vikings I've ever seen â€" nothing will happen to him."

I swallowed, trying to nod and smile for him. I didn't know why I was so worried. Maybe that sounds selfish, but I really didn't know my father. I didn't have any reason to be as worried as I was for him, but that dream kept floating to the forefront of my mind, and I felt like I knew him suddenly.

Snotlout nodded at me, too, before standing up and crossing the threshold of the front door again, leaving me and Fishlegs alone. We both looked at each other for a long moment, I drew my knees up to my chest, and we both looked away again. We didn't speak for the whole day â€" the only things that were said were constant questions of spotting Outcast ships or dragons on the horizon, and Astrid and Snotlout kept a constant lookout.

When the day was finally over, it was with relief that everyone settled down for sleep, until Astrid pointed out that we better keep a watch over the entrances, just in case the Outcasts attacked in the night.

"Don't you think you're going a little overboard?" I raised an eyebrow at her, leaning up on my elbow.

"No, I don't!" she yelled. "I would have thought you, Hiccup, would know not to underestimate Alvin! We have to be one step ahead of him, always. I'll take first watch."

"Don't be stupid," I replied. "You need sleep, you've been standing guard all day. I'll keep watch."

"No!" Her voice rose, and now both she and Snotlout were glaring at me. "Protecting you is supposed to be our top priority, and whatever happens, I don't want that to change."

Snotlout frowned, looking a little annoyed by this, but he merely said, "I'll take second watch. Wake me whenever you start getting tired."

Astrid's hard features softened as she turned her attention to the other boy. With as much gratitude as a girl like her could muster, she smiled and nodded, saying, "Thank you, Snotlout." She stood and walked from the room, her back ramrod straight as she sat in the doorway.

Snotlout watched her go, a mishmash of emotions flitting across his face before he eventually lay down on the floor as well. I rested my head against Toothless' back, hoping that tomorrow would mark the day that my dad and Gobber finally came home.

26. Whether You Like it or Not

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 26: Whether You Like it or Not

**A/N: Hey, this chapter title reminds me of a great joke I heard: Animal hide. Leather you like it or not xD xD xD xD Anyway, I feel like I'm driving you all slowly insane with the sheer number of updates, so um...don't review. Like if you want, but like, you don't have to review, or even read this chapter. I probably actually shouldn't even be posting this just cuz...yeah... **

**Oh, also, to the person who asked me what my favorite DoB episode was, PhoenixofMyth... yeah. I'm not sure I HAVE one, actually. I really liked the Night and the Fury, and Tunnel Vision, but Live and Let Fly felt kind of like they were trying too hard to pander to little boys, and I'm obviously not a little boy xD seriously why is everything for HTTYD advertised to boys D: I actually thought they did amazing with making sure the movie appeared to both girls and boys. Girls enjoy the romance between Hiccup and Astrid, the

friendship of Hiccup and Toothless, and the slow evolution of Hiccup's character. Boys enjoy it because dragons and fight scenes xD or at least, that's what I'm guessing because every ad that's for boys for HTTYD shows Hiccup holding his ornate shield or Inferno xP
**

* * *

><p>It was not as dark as it had been in my dream about Eret, but it was still dim. The only source of light in the room was coming from a flickering, guttering candle. For a moment, all I could see was that tiny flame, trying so hard to survive, sure to be snuffed out when the wax burned down.<p>

And then Alvin's scarred, sneering face came into view. He looked worse for the wear than I had ever seen him, with his beard tangled and his Viking helmet askew. His armor was on, mostly crooked, and he held a battleaxe in one hand, but he wasn't using it. He leered at the two men in front of him, over the candle, and my heart caught in my throat. Dad and Gobber stood across from him, both bound tightly by ropes and chained by handcuffs.

Unlike Alvin, however, Dad and Gobber looked unhurt, though angry, as Alvin began striding back and forth in front of them and the single guttering candle. "Where is it?" He slammed his axe down on some hard surface, and I realized the candle must be resting on a table, impossible to make out in the darkness. "Tell me, and your suffering will be cut short. If you refuse, I'll make you regret it."

The witch Excellinor stood just behind her son, but she'd blended in so well with the shadows that at first, I hadn't seen her. When she became visible, her words became audible, spoken in a kind of furious hiss, like she was reciting a spell. "It's that Hiccup boy," she repeated, over and over, like some kind of mantra. "He's done it, he's done it, I know he's done it."

Alvin spun around sharply, looking away from the two prisoners, to glare sharply at her. "Mother," he hissed, "do you mind? I'm trying to reason with them!"

"They're of no use!" Excellinor slammed her hand down on the table now, yelling almost as loudly as Alvin. "We need the Hiccup boy, Alvin! But you let him slip through our fingers, I can't believe you did that, letting him get away on that island like that!"

"That was entirely your fault!" Alvin raged, clearly stung at being reminded of something that was still obviously an open wound. "It was you who couldn't perform your magic on that island, otherwise!"

"That man-eating garden was too powerful, it would have overridden any spells I tried to perform!" Excellinor yelled. For the first time since I'd ever seen her, on my birthday of last year, when she had forced me to dig up the Dragon Jewel, she was not bone white. Her color was high, her cheeks flushed as she hollered at her son. "I told you we'd have to find him manually, but you let him slip away! And you brought me back another, with no worth whatsoever, no value to me!"

"He has valuable knowledge of the King of the Wilderwest!" Alvin

looked abashed, but angry. "He's still hiding those pages from us, I know it!"

"Then why don't you go and find them, instead of making a big stink and threatening him with death every week or so?" The witch jeered.

While all this was going on, Dad and Gobber were struggling to find a way to break out of their chains, subtly. I wanted to tell them it was no use. Outcast chains were made to be impossible to get out of. But of course, it was a dream, so they wouldn't have been able to hear me even if I had shouted. I watched them struggle, and then Gobber accidentally knocked over the candle in his haste. The wooden table blazed suddenly with bright flames, licking everything in sight. The arguing mother and son were snapped out of their disagreement by the sight of the fire, and I expected them to panic, butâ€¦|

"**Gurglelap, flick-a-flame," **Excellinor said coolly, pointing her hand at the flames. They died at once, and something in my memory stirred when she spoke the words. Gobber was beginning to look a little creeped out by now, considering this woman had just banished the flames with her hand.

"They're not talking," Alvin growled impatiently at his mother, as though nothing had happened.

"That's because they're not the ones who stole it," she snapped. "It's that Hiccup boy, I know it is!"

"It's not possible! His leg, it would have set off the alarms," Alvin snapped. "I know what kind of protection that thing was equipped with, and I know that Hiccup would never have been able to sneak in and out of there without being seen! He's never even landed on this island, and not to mention Humongous! Odin help us if he ever managed to steal anything from us, he's the worst Burglar in the uncivilized world."

Excellinor frowned, staring off into space with those pale eyes. "It doesn't make any sense," she said thoughtfully, and her eyes narrowed even farther, like she was calculating possibilities in her head, moving through each thought quicker than most could blink.

But just as her mind was whirling, mine was, too. Never landed on this island? What did that part mean? I had landed on Outcast Island tons of times, way more than I could count and frankly, way more than I wanted to, anyway.

"Take them to one of the prisons, I suppose," Excellinor waved a careless hand in the direction of Dad and Gobber. "If they don't talk by the dawn, we can always execute them."

"I thought you said we weren't allowed to kill everyone," Alvin muttered sourly, as the dream began to fade to black.

"I didn't say we couldn't kill anyoneâ€¦|"

I opened my eyes and sat up, gasping for air and my mind still whirling with that dream. The only thing I could really seem to make sense of right now was that Dad and Gobber had been captured, they

were on Outcast Island, and they'd be dead by tomorrow morning. It was night. It was pitch black outside the windows, and Tuffnut, his sister, and Fishlegs were all still sleeping, the dragons snoozing lightly. Toothless opened his green eyes the instant I opened mine, and for a moment, we both sat there in the darkness, him asking me silently what was wrong, and me finding myself unable to answer.

The silence was broken by voices outside, and I realized that Astrid's watch had ended, but their conversation didn't sound like that. It sounded angry. At least Astrid did. I crawled closer to the closed front door, pressing my ear against it. I heard footsteps on the porch.

"You're being unfair, Snotlout," Astrid said coolly, "Hiccup hates this just as much as the rest of us, you know that."

"No, I don't," the other replied stubbornly. "You certainly wouldn't know from looking at him, anyway."

"He's scared," Astrid interrupted hotly. "He doesn't know what's going on, he's worried about his father"

"A father he can't even remember!"

"That's not fair, that's not his fault! Stop accusing him of things he has no control over!"

"If this hadn't happened, if he hadn't wandered off into the forest that night with Humongous"

I heard a sudden, sharp blow being dealt, and Astrid dropped her voice, yet every word carried. "Don't you dare blame Hiccup for what Alvin's done to him. Don't. You. Dare."

"It is partly his fault, Astrid! He's just being stupid, and he won't do anything except sit around on his ass, and Stoick expects us to do the same, just drops off the face of the earth with a quick little, 'oh, by the way, keep my son safe in case a bunch of bloodthirsty barbarians attack while I'm away'! That's all he said to us, all he cares about! I just wish Hiccup didn't have to be to be such a _burden_."

Maybe because the day had passed in such a blur of unfeeling numbness, but I was feeling every emotion tenfold right now, and the fear for Dad and Gobber was suddenly forgotten in the hurt and anger I felt over what was being said. I heard Astrid dealing him more blows, and for a second, I sat there seething. But I wasn't the stewing type. I wasn't going to let anger sidetrack me. I jumped to my feet and motioned for Toothless to follow me. He tilted his head questioningly, but I shook mine.

_Don't ask questions, just go with it, _I mouthed at him. To my surprise, he nodded in agreement and I opened the back door, letting it swing open silently. We made it off the porch and onto the wet grass where I slowly hiked myself up onto his back, but just as we were getting ready to rise up

"Ow! Astrid, wait, wait! Did you hear something?"

The sound of blows paused, and then Astrid, "Through here."

I realized what she meant a second too late, and by that time, she and Snotlout were already behind the house, both of them glaring at me now instead of arguing with each other.

"What, exactly, are you doing?" Astrid put her hands on her hips. "You do know that Stoick put us on dragon lockdown, right? And, uh, last I checked, he said no one was to leave the island while he was gone."

"His orders are void," I replied, trying to keep my response short. "I'm leaving."

This was all it took. Snotlout started yelling again, although this time, it was at me. "Why do you have be so goddamn selfish? Here we are, trying to keep you safe, and you're going to flying out on a joyride!"

"LOOK!" I never even knew I could raise my voice as loud as I did that day, but both Snotlout and Astrid looked surprised. "Dad and Gobber have been captured, Alvin has them, they're on Outcast Island, and Excellinor wants to execute them in the morning. I'm leaving to get them back, and Eret, too. Any questions?"

"Just one," Astrid leaned her elbow on Toothless' saddle. "Why in Hel are you going alone?"

"I didn't think you'd want to be invited," I said angrily, though I kept my gaze fixed on Snotlout. "Sorry to have been such a burden on you."

To his credit, Snotlout did not flinch; he stared at me rather coolly before replying. "Well, whatever you were thinking, you can get off Toothless right now because you are not going anywhere on one of your effing lone wolf trips again!"

"Leave me alone! Just leave me alone! This has nothing to do with you!"

"Nothing to do with me? That's my chief!"

"He's my father!"

"Fine, then! Have fun going to Outcast Island, all by yourself, where you'll most likely get captured by Alvin the Treacherous, right alongside the other two. You'll be doing them a world of help, Hiccup."

I heard a sudden noise to my left, something between a snarl and a sneeze, the Nadder's signature noise, and when I looked over, Astrid was seated on Stormfly's back. "Uh, boys? You're still arguing about this? C'mon, let's go."

"You guys aren't invited," I replied.

"Hiccup, invited?" She laughed, a little sarcastically. "It's not a party to me! Thor, will you just shut up and fly?"

I frowned at her. "You guys will be in danger."

"You know, we have been planning to be your last line of defense for the last three days now," Snotlout pointed out. "We're all kind of used to risking our lives by this point. Hookfang, c'mon!" He pushed open the back door and called for his dragon, effectively waking up the others.

And, of course, when they found out where we were going, all they wanted was to come, too.

Well, except for Fishlegs, mainly.

"Do we have to go?" he squeaked uncertainly. "Can't we just tell one of the adults, or something?"

"They could be dead by the morning! The ride to Outcast Island is much quicker by dragon than by boat, you know the adults won't ride dragons anyway, and besides that, Dad wanted everything kept private as possible. I'm not telling anyone who doesn't already know where he went, or why he went there."

Astrid looked, for just a second, a little confused. "Why did he go there, Hiccup? To cut off Alvin's forces at the base?"

I swallowed, my mind filling with images of my hands, digging in the dirt, pulling out that beautiful, pulsing red jewel. _King. _"Yeah, let's go with that."

Fishlegs reluctantly mounted his Gronckle, the twins got settled on their Zippleback, and Snotlout and Hookfang gave me a thumbs-up to let me know everyone was ready to go. I glanced around at them all, biting my lip.

Astrid read my mind. "We're going with you, whether you like it or not."

Trying to stop Astrid, I thought to myself, must be kind of like trying to stop the clouds from moving in the sky. Speaking of the skyâ€¦I glanced up at it, all dark, no stars or moon to light the way.

"Alright then," I grumbled, seeing no way to ditch them as of yet, "let's get going, then."

27. Hero's Song

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 27: Hero's Song

**A/N: So I don't risk spoilers, I'm, um, waiting until the end of the chapter to say anything. **

* * *

><p>The sky was clear, but the night was starless and so dark that I

depended entirely on Toothless to be my guide. He steered us pretty expertly around sea stacks that I didn't even see coming in the darkness. I heard the others having difficulties behind me, and at last ordered them all to fall into line behind me and let Toothless guide them, too. But as the sun rose, and dawn began breaking over the horizon, an unwelcome sight greeted us: there, smack dab in the middle of our path, were Outcast ships.<p>

The brutal red crest gleamed bright and unmistakable in the first few rays of sunlight, and I signaled for everybody to drop down onto a nearby island, which was really just a tiny square foot of sand with a few trees. I ducked behind the sparse vegetation, and the others soon followed.

"What do we do, Hiccup?" These were the first words out of Astrid's mouth when she landed.

To be honest, I was a little tired of being the one who came up with the plans, but that had obviously been my role in the group before now, because everybody looked to me whenever something went wrong.

"Why don't we just fly up?" Snotlout's arrogant voice cut into my thoughts, and my temper rose. I had been feeling on edge all day, and the stress and exhaustion, coupled with this, was too much.

"What? Do you think I have some sort of magical summoning ability of cloud cover? No, I don't! And every dragon here except Toothless is a shallow air dragon, so they won't want to fly upward far enough to reach the higher clouds, not to mention you guys won't be able to breathe. So no, flying up is not an option."

Snotlout sighed, leaning back against Hookfang. "Any other ideas?"

"No," I admitted quietly. "No, none."

For a second, we all just sat there in silence, everyone staring at me or their dragons, either waiting for me to come up with a new plan or just silently despairing. All I could really do was look at the sunrise, realizing we were too late to save Dad and Gobber anyway. They might, even now, be dying.

"Oh, wait! I've got something!" Tuffnut sat upright, suddenly excited, his thin face flushed. "The Outcasts," he paused for dramatic effect, pointing at the ships just beyond our ring of trees, "want you, right?" He pointed at me.

I nodded.

"And we," he gestured to himself, his sister, and the other teens, "need a way to get past the Outcasts safely, right?"

I nodded again.

"No." Astrid shook her head vehemently, hopping off Stormfly. "You are not suggesting what I think you're suggesting." She started towards the twins, but Tuffnut's words repeated themselves in my head, reminding me that I had a choice here, a decision to make.

"He's got a point," I pointed out.

Astrid came to a stop between the Zippleback's two heads. "You can't be seriously thinking about doing this, Hiccup. We need you here."

"You know, Tuffnut's idea is a good one," Snotlout spoke up. "The Outcasts want Hiccup and chances are, if anyone else tries to do the distracting â€" or if they think it's anyone else at least â€" they won't just keep their attention on the other person, they'll go for Hiccup, right?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "Snotlout, what are you saying?"

"It doesn't have to be you doing the distracting," he replied quietly. "The Outcasts just have to think it is."

"Yeah, because that'll work," I said sarcastically, readying myself in Toothless' saddle. "I'll do the distracting, you guys justâ€"

"Wait," Snotlout urged. "Look, it doesn't have to be you. Youâ€|I could trade clothes and dragons with you. We're about the same height, and if I don't get close enough to the Outcast ships, they won't tell a difference. They'll focus their fire on me and Toothless, while you and Hookfang make it out safely." He leaned back in his saddle, arms crossed.

"I am not putting Toothless at risk in this crazy plan."

"It's a crazy plan that'll work," Snotlout pointed out. "And besides, do you have any better ideas? Even if you do the distracting, they'll think it's not you if they see you riding another dragon. Either way, it has to be Toothless."

I looked down at my dragon, rubbing his head, scratching him gently. I didn't want to admit to myself that Snotlout and Tuffnut had a good idea between them, but they did. "Wait. What about you?"

"What about me?"

"How will you get out?"

"Don't worry about me," Snotlout replied easily. "I'll keep 'em distracted for a bit, and once I've done my part, I'll pull out and meet up with you guys on Outcast Island. Okay?"

I hesitated, looking up at the sky, studying the clear blue above us. It was no longer pink, meaning that dawn was officially over and true morning was approaching. If we didn't get a move onâ€|

"Okay," I relented uncertainly. "Okay."

"Alright, then, take off your clothes," Snotlout jumped off Hookfang, taking off his Viking helmet with ease and then undoing his belt and vest, handing it all off to me. I stared at him for a second in amazement.

"I can't undress in front of you!"

"Hiccup, if we don't get a move on, Alvin is going to blast Stoick and Gobber to pieces," Snotlout pointed out. "This really isn't the time to be worrying about modesty."

He had a point, but I made Astrid and Ruffnut look away anyway before consenting to strip down and exchange clothes with Snotlout. His clothes were a little big on me, but the pants were at least kept up by the belt, so I didn't run the risk of showing the world my underwear. It was the trading dragons part that got to me. I just couldn't leave Toothless. I kept making up excuses not to get on Hookfang, little reasons why this plan wouldn't work, but Snotlout finally said, rather unsympathetically, "Hiccup, stop hugging and blowing kisses to your dragon, okay? Gods, at worst, it's just gonna be a couple hours." He hopped on the Night Fury's back, and Toothless' pupils stayed wide as ever, which meant that he approved of Snotlout.

Then, as if just remembering something, he jumped off again and reached down into the collar of my shirt, on him, of course, and pulled out a small necklace. Dangling from the chain was a black star, revolving slowly on the pendant. "Here. You put it around your neck. In case anything happens, I don't want Alvin touching it."

"Uhâ€¦" I slowly took it from him, the black star resting in my palm. "What is it?"

"Your dad gave it to me," he replied softly, closing my fingers around it. "After the Battle of the Traitor."

He might have said something after that, I didn't know. Something about a black star being the ultimate honor for outstanding bravery and stuff, and apparently he won it because Dad thought that that was what he had shown during the battle, but I clung to that word: 'traitor'. It made me think of the mark on my arm, made me remember my real father standing over me, steely gray eyes, cold and angry as he clutched his sword, towering over meâ€¦

"Hiccup. You with me?"

"The battle of what?"

Snotlout suddenly looked shifty. "I didn't mean to call it that, Hiccup, it just slipped out â€" honest."

I looked down at the black star again, running my thumb over it. I didn't know why I suddenly connected that memory with that word, that mark on my arm, but I made my decision then: I could not think about it. I had more important things to think about at the moment, and so I slipped it around my neck and jumped on Hookfang. Watching Snotlout climb onto Toothless, however, another thought occurred to me. "Wait, you don't know how to ride Toothless!"

"Yes, I do," he replied impatiently. "Press down with the heel on the back of the pedal to extend the tail fin, press down with the toes on the front of the pedal to narrow it."

"How did you know that?"

"I actually listened to you a few times on your flight with me," he told me, then added, "And don't come out until I give the signal."

"What's the signal?" I asked him.

"A chorus of Grimbeard's Last Song when it's safe to come out â€"if something goes wrong, the Berk lullaby."

"Wait, wait, wait," I held my hands up, "how will I know the difference? I've never heard either."

"We'll tell you," Astrid promised. "Go, Snotlout."

Snotlout nodded, rose up on Toothless, and vanished from sight seconds later. I rose up on Hookfang through the trees, peering through the foliage to watch Snotlout circling the Outcast ships, buzzing around them.

Masked heads slowly turned in his direction. Bows and catapults were loaded. Swords and knives were unsheathed. Snotlout darted down, past the ships, skimming the water, laughing when arrows missed him, when rocks launched into the water. A knife was thrown, carefully calculated, but Snotlout zoomed out of the way at the last second, and it sank beneath the waves.

He circled the ships once more, as several Outcasts fired, and he opened his mouth, singing.

"I sailed so far to be a King, but the time was never right,

I lost my way on a stormy past, got wrecked in starless night,

But let my heart be wrecked by hurricanes, and my ship by stormy weather,

I know I am a Hero, and a Hero is forever!"

The last word was shouted out, ringing, echoing off the sea stacks and boats, echoing back to me. Astrid tapped my shoulder.

"That's the signal come on!"

Fishlegs went first, zooming around the ships nervously, keeping his eyes glued on Snotlout. The twins went next, casting glittering eyes on the Outcast ships. But they were good and they didn't do anything and they stuck to the plan.

"You're next, Hiccup."

"No," I shook my head, my eyes fixed on Snotlout. "You go next."

"Hiccupâ€"

"You go, Astrid, I'll go afterward."

She pressed her lips together, clearly unhappy, but she didn't argue, rising up above the trees and shooting out, Stormfly's tail alert and ready, just in case she needed to use it.

As I rose up, too, Snotlout started in on the next verse.

"In another time, another place, I could have been a King,
But in my castle's ruined towers, the lonely seabirds sing,
I burned up my Tomorrows, I cannot go back ever,
But I am still a Hero, and a Hero is forever!"

It was then that it happened. I was halfway across, almost to the sea stack, the only one that was safely far enough away from the ships and large enough to hold everyone's dragons that they landed there. I was almost there when it happened. Snotlout turned suddenly, determined to keep their gazes locked on him, his figure aglow with the rising sun behind him.

And one of the Outcasts let fly a single arrow.

I saw it in slow motion: Snotlout, his face stretched into a grin, laughing, as the arrow zinged its way toward him, borne by the morning wind. It found its mark, the square center of his chest, and for a moment he stayed like that, fists raised in triumph, the word 'forever' dying on his lips.

And then he went limp, and nothing was tying him onto Toothless and he slipped out of the saddle and beneath the waves, as lost as a drop in the ocean.

* * *

><p>AN: DID I SHATTER YOUR HEART? :DDDDDD Okay granted Snotlout was being mean to Hiccup in the last chapter, but to be honest, I sympathized more with him than I did with Hiccup last chapter. Hiccup walks around grumpy and with his butt on his shoulders so often that it's seriously really difficult to sympathize with him, at least in this fic, but Snotlout...I don't know. Anyway. I don't own Cressida Cowell's song, and I do not own the idea of the death, like all the details. Also, I don't own the idea behind Black Stars. **

28. Let's Go

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 28: Let's Go

A/N: Lame title, I know...but hey, you cannot judge me today, you know why? I am sick. I am very ill and it took me forever to get this written. I knew where I wanted it to go, I knew what had to happen, I started it many times, but I just couldn't finish it. And that was very annoying. So. Now Snotlout and Humongous are both down. Things are heating up, huh?

* * *

><p>I was aware that I was screaming, that masked heads were turning in my direction now, bows were once again being loaded and spears were being launched, but I was almost frozen in my place, everything I had just seen swirling around in my head. I didn't remember much about my time with Snotlout before the memory loss â€" mostly I recalled that he had been nice, that we'd gotten into a drinking contest once, and that he made fun of me for my small stature and one leg. But I was still screaming, calling for him, like I thought he could rise back up, defy the grave itself, and the cruel ocean that was carrying him away from me.<p>

I saw a flash of black out of the corner of my eye, Toothless, falling into the water, unable to stay airborne, and then I started screaming for my dragon. Hookfang plunged us into the water, but instead of heading for where Toothless had fallen, he kept swimming around in the dark, endless ocean, looking for the body that was not there. My lungs burned with the need for oxygen, and my eyes stung at the contact with saltwater. Unable to keep them open, I squeezed them closed, but noises made me open them again: Toothless had located us, and was attempting to communicate to Hookfang that he still had a live human on his back who currently couldn't breathe.

The other dragon must have understood, because he allowed Toothless to take me off his back and up in the air, but he didn't follow us up into the sky.

"Wait," I gasped, drawing in great gulps of air after only a few minutes underwater, my eyes streaming from the saltwater. "Wait, Toothless." My throat was scratchy and flooded with ocean water as well. "Wait for Hookfang."

I knew that dragons could breathe underwater, but I didn't want us to fly without him â€" I didn't want to leave anyone else behind.

A stinging pain in my shoulder suddenly brought me back to the moment, and twisting back to look, I saw an Outcast with an empty bow, an arrow shaft protruding from my shoulder. Gritting my teeth against the pain, I pressed down on the tail fin, extending it. Toothless rose up, higher and higher, to the height of the others, the sea stack only a few feet away now. My shoulder was hurting so badly that it was hard to focus, but I forced myself to stay in the moment. We landed on the sea stack relatively safely, but almost instantly, Astrid jumped from her perch on Stormfly. "Hiccup, you're hurt."

"I'm fine," I replied between tightly gritted teeth, willing the words to be true. "Get back up in the sky, they'll be following us, or they'll send a message to Alvin so he'll know to expect us. We have to beat the messenger there." I clicked down on the tail fin again, readying myself for another barrage of arrows and spears.

I guess Astrid must have noticed that I was facing the Outcast ships again, though, because she hesitated on the point of mounting her dragon. "What are you gonna do?"

"I'm gonna go back, see if I can get Hookfang back up with us and recoverâ€" My voice didn't break; it just gave out before I could say the last word, his name.

Astrid crossed her arms and leaned against her dragon, raising an eyebrow skeptically. "You're going to go out there, alone, against all those Outcasts? Hiccup, you're the last person we need to get captured. Wait here, and I'll go."

"No. Astrid, no. You're not—I'm not—I'm not as important. I'll go, and the rest of you," I indicated her and the remaining teens with my uninjured shoulder. "You guys go on ahead of me. Get to Outcast Island, get Dad and Gobber out of there, and get back to Berk once you're out. I'll—I'll get Hookfang out of there, I'll circle back around to Outcast Island when I can, and I'll probably make it back to Berk with you guys. Okay?" Of course, if Alvin or his men got to me, then they got to me, and there really wasn't anything I could do about that, but I had no intention of telling Astrid or the others that.

Astrid scowled at me, clearly not happy with how I was handling things, but I just nudged Toothless, extended the tail fin, and we took off again. Toothless appeared to have understood what I'd explained to Astrid, because he shot down into the water the moment we were clear of the sea stack. I held my breath, but had to close my eyes eventually, knowing that they'd only water if I tried to keep them open. I could feel Toothless underneath me, propelling us forward. I depended solely on him to keep us moving, trying to hold my breath for as long as I could, but he remembered me; he popped up out of the water long enough for me to draw a few deep breaths, but just as we prepared to go back under, I heard that cross between a snarl and a sneeze, and my eyes narrowed.

Astrid and Stormfly landed in the water with a splash, sending a positive wall of water my way. Toothless swerved to avoid it and I glared at Astrid. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm not letting you do this alone," she replied, ducking as an arrow launched over our heads. I watched its progress for a second, landing in the ocean beside us and slipping to the bottom without so much as a sound. "You're not welcome here," I told her. "Go back with the others, okay? I need you guys to stay safe."

"I'm not leaving you. You're what the Outcasts want, they won't be aiming for me"

"They will be, though! They want me alive, but you, Astrid, they don't care about you. They'll kill you!" Almost on cue, another arrow flew, and Astrid just barely avoided it.

A ripple in the water in front of us made itself known and a wet Hookfang popped out, his great yellow eyes downcast, his snout dipping into the water. I swallowed, recognizing the hopeless look on his face. He hadn't found him. The ocean must have carried him away by now, too far to reach. I wanted to reach him. I hardly remembered him, but it felt wrong to leave him here, drifting in the ocean, lost and wandering even in death. He'd given his life for mine, and I couldn't even give him a proper funeral.

I reached out and put a hand on Hookfang's snout. "C'mon, big guy," I coaxed softly, trying to smile for him. "He's okay, he's okay. We need to leave, though. Now."

The dragon made a small, sad noise in the back of his throat, and even though I didn't speak his language, I didn't need a translator to tell me what he was saying. _I miss him. _

"I know. I know," I tried to keep my voice soothing, even as the Outcast ships drew nearer and nearer. "Butâ€|but he's okay." He wasn't. He wasn't okay. I was lying. But Hookfang slowly spread his great, clawed wings and took off into the sky, rising above us, our sea stack, everything. He flew behind a cloud and vanished from sight, leaving me and Astrid to stare up at him, blinking saltwater out of our eyes. I brushed my soaked hair back from my forehead and took a deep breath. Okay. Hookfang was gone. He had left when he realized that his rider wasn't coming back. Thatâ€|that was okay. He'd be back soon. I turned my face away for mere moments, letting hidden emotions play out on my face, letting the pain in for just a minute before turning back to Astrid. "Iâ€|I don't know where he's gone."

Sunlight poured out of the sky in weak golden rays, illuminating the impossible vastness of the open ocean. Astrid drew a breath. Something told me she was readying herself, as well. "We'll never get to Outcast Island like this," she muttered to herself. "Those ships will beat us there."

The ships she spoke of were no longer quite so small â€" they were closing in.

"Stormfly, up!"

Toothless and Stormfly both rose up into the air at once, weaving in and out of clouds, trying to lose our pursuers. The higher we rose, the harder it became to breathe, and Stormfly kept growing smaller in the distance, a sign that we were going higher than most dragons were comfortable with.

"Toothless!" I gasped, putting a hand on his head. "Settle down, bud. Settle down. Drop down, bud. Let's go down."

I pressed down on the tail fin, sending us into a dive. Toothless closed his wings almost completely, heading straight for the sea stack. Astrid and Stormfly had already arrived there, the Nadder's wings spread wide.

"Alright, uhâ€|" I jumped off Toothless instantly, shading my eyes against the sun to look out at the ships. They hadn't appeared to have gotten any closer, but we needed to move. And fast.

"Someone needs to go after Hookfang. Astrid?"

"I am not doing that," she said bluntly. "I'm going to Outcast Island."

"Right, then, uhâ€"

"Why don't you do it, Hiccup?" Astrid jumped off Stormfly.

I scowled at her. "If you go to Outcast Island, I'm going to Outcast Island."

"It isn't a party, Hiccup."

"I know that," I replied curtly. "Ruffnut, Tuffnut â€" you two are on Nightmare duty. Fishlegs, you'll come with me and Astrid. C'mon, guys, let's go." I looked up at the sky again, imagining I could see the distant speck that was Hookfang, still flying through the clouds, mourning his lost rider.

I closed my eyes as I remembered him, and I remembered Humongous, too. I'd told Dad that I didn't want anyone else to die for me. But whether I liked it or not, it seemed like the one thing I could count on everyone around me to do.

29. Checkmated

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 29: Checkmated

A/N: Um...lots of actionnnnnn huh :D Don't ask where the witch has gone, we'll deal with her later. Sorry for not posting anything on Christmas, things happened unexpected. And uh, sorry for promising you guys a minor spoiler for Unbreakable and not delivering. The holidays were really crazy this year. It'll be up tomorrow, I expect, on my Tumblr. (writerofberk). Please feel free to check it out. And I hope everyone had a Merry Christmas, and I hope they have a Happy New Year! (I'll probably be too busy to post again until after the New Year, so...)

* * *

><p>The twins took off quickly, and I breathed a sigh of relief when they were gone. With their inability to keep up with what was going on around them, they'd only be a liability when we got to Outcast Island, and I was eager to get them out of the way as fast as I could. The Outcast ships didn't move the whole time we rested there on the sea stack, Astrid fretting unnecessarily over the arrow in my shoulder.<p>

"We should get it out, Hiccup," she said for probably the hundredth time, just before we took off. "I have a knife, and we could snap out the shaft, andâ€"

"Astrid, look." I swung one leg over Toothless' back, throwing another edgy glance behind me, at the stationary ships. "I appreciate that you're trying to help me, but really, I don't want to risk it, okay? If something goes wrong, I might not be able to help rescue Dad and Gobber. They're the important ones on this mission, okay? Fret about me all you want when we get back to Berk. I'll get the arrow out then."

"I'm just saying, if we meet up with Outcasts," she pointed out, "and they see the arrow, they're going to go straight for your shoulder once they realize it's weakened."

I knew she was right, but I was not going to admit to that. "It'll be

fine. And remember, the plan is not to attack the Outcasts, but sneak in there quickly and quietly."

For half a second, I expected Snotlout to make some joking comment about wanting to blow off Outcast heads, and then the truth hit me again, over and over like a repeated blow. I realized then that whatever hope I'd tried to harbor was misplaced, because Snotlout was definitely gone. I had seen it happen myself, and he was too far away now to be rescued, even by Hookfang. He would have drowned by now, if the arrow hadn't killed him first.

I tilted my head down, staring at Toothless' saddle, but Snotlout's helmet slid off my head with a clunk, landing on the worn leather. I picked up the helmet again, barely paying attention to steering Toothless now as I examined it. Even Snotlout's head was bigger than mine, and strangely, this just made me even sadder. I slipped it back on my head. It would get in the way in battle, but that didn't matter. I owed it to Snotlout, who'd given his life for me.

My cousin, who I barely remembered. And I would never get the chance to make new memories with him.

It was lucky that Astrid jerked me out of my reverie right then by pointing to Outcast Island, drawing nearer and nearer on the horizon. I probably would have cried if she hadn't. I lightly nudged Toothless with my knee, and we started a slower descent, heading straight for the beach. The early morning air was sweet on my lips and for a moment, everything simply fell away as we dived. For a moment, my dragon and I were one, as free as the wind, as limitless as the sky. And then everything came rushing back and Toothless snapped out his wings, pulling us up into a glide at the last second, landing lightly on the deserted beach.

I kept waiting for Outcasts to at least spot the dragons in the sky and start panicking, and pour out into the town square, but they stayed shut up in their homes. Maybe they were waiting for us to let our guards down? And then what? Ambush? I considered these options as I started for the prisons, but seconds later, I flung out an arm to stop Astrid, Fishlegs, and the dragons from going any farther. This was unnecessary in Toothless' case, because he stopped the moment I did. But Astrid plowed into my arm.

"What is it?"

"Get back to the beach." I lifted my eyes to the empty watchtower again. Alvin always had people in that watchtower. Sometimes, it was as little as one person, but there was always someone in there. If the watchtower was empty, they had clearly abandoned the island. But why? My brain worked furiously at this question.

Astrid took a few steps back, but before listening to me, she just had to question me. "Why?"

"Go." I tried to inject some force into my voice, but I wasn't very good at telling people what to do. Leadership was not something that came naturally to me. "There's nobody here."

"How do you know?" Astrid's voice was barely above a whisper, and I suddenly realized mine was, too. The terror of facing the island I had tried so hard to escape made it difficult to talk as I normally

would.

"The watchtower's abandoned," I explained, figuring it'd be easier just to answer her questions than ignore her and get her angry with me. "Alvin's not here, now go."

Astrid started for the beach, moving to tug Fishlegs along with her, but the bigger boy was frozen, gaping at something just ahead of us. While Astrid and I had been speaking, the Outcasts we spoke of had been working. They dropped down, completely surrounding us, and a wire cage fell over our heads. I tried to yell for the others to run, but it was too late, it fell too fast. The Outcasts surrounded the cage now instead, circling it in that grim, predatory way that only Outcasts could. I tried my hardest not to be scared.

A few others outside of my line of vision started trying to subdue our dragons, and when I heard Toothless' moans and roars of pain, I bounded to the other side of the cage and kicked the nearest Outcast in the shins, reaching for the key ring on his belt. Unfortunately, my kick wasn't very powerful and they grabbed me before I could grab them, pinning me to the wall of the cage and smacking my head against the bars repeatedly.

I ground my teeth together, trying just to think through the pain. All I knew was that Toothless needed me, and I couldn't get to him. It wouldn't be the first time I'd failed him. But the harder I struggled to break free of the Outcast's iron grip, the harder he would hit my head against the cage. Eventually, the blows caught up to me, and a ringing started in my ears, my vision turned black and I blacked out.

* * *

><p>It was dark when I awoke. Completely dark. I couldn't see my own hand in front of my face, and it was cold as Hel down here. I rubbed at my eyes, proving they were open, but then that opened up new worries. Alvin had threatened to blind me before. He wouldn't have done it, would he? My heart started beating uncomfortably fast as I reached out for the sides of the cell, feeling around for the cool metal walls. It felt more like wood, and the cell was smaller than I remembered. I was in the dark, and I was in a small space, and I was alone. For a moment, I gave myself over to fear, dropping my head onto my knees, wanting to cry everything out before forcing myself back into the game.<p>

But there were other people besides me involved in this, and they were more important. I had to keep myself together, and I had no choice. If Astrid and Fishlegs had been captured, I needed to find them as soon as possible. My eyes didn't even hurt, though, so I could only assume that if Alvin blinded me, he'd done it painlessly, and painless wasn't his style. He liked to drag things out, as I recalled.

I put my hands down on the floor, readying myself to stand, but almost immediately I was distracted. The floor didn't feel like metal, either. It was soft and damp, earthy. Dirt. My cell had never been open to the ground before. Alvin had always felt like that would risk me digging my way to freedom or something, so he'd never given me the option. What was I doing now, in a wooden cell with a dirt floor? And more importantly, was digging my way to freedom even

possible?

There was the sudden sound of creaking wood that made me glance up, and a tiny square of golden light, very far above me, made my eyes water. I could see somebody peering down at me from all the way up there, watching me in the blackness, and I suddenly realized: I was in the same sort of cell that Eret had been in from my dream the other night. Did that mean Eret was here?

Using the dim light from the door above me, I searched the cell, crawling on my hands and knees, calling Eret's name. He didn't answer me, and the cell really would have been too small for more than one person, anyway. I listened to the sounds of somebody descending into my cell, their footsteps getting increasingly louder as they got closer.

Alvin was coming for me. I struggled to keep calm as he at last arrived, all his grimy, treacherous glory. He still looked worse than I had ever seen him, and currently, in the dim illumination, he also looked greatly annoyed by something.

"Well, come on, then!" He ordered, grabbing me up by my collar and physically hauling me up the ladder that was practically invisible in the darkness. How he knew where the rungs were, I had no way of knowing, and I had no intentions to ask. He hurried up into the sunlight, physically throwing me away from him the first chance he got. I was instantly up on my feet, as desperate to be away from him as he was to be away from me, but I fell back down again.

What? That wasn't right. I looked down at my legs â€" I don't know what I was expecting, maybe to have lost another one during my brief unconscious spell â€" and I found an empty trouser leg where my prosthetic was supposed to be. "Whatâ€|whatâ€|" I lifted my eyes to Alvin's, so overwhelmed by something so simple.

Alvin smiled mockingly at me. "The Outcasts who transported you felt you were too, how shall I put itâ€|rough with your leg. They decided to take it to avoid taking risks. I really wasn't in any hurry to stop them. So." He grabbed me up again, half-dragging me across the dirt, but I kicked my one leg and struggled to get away.

"Let me go, let meâ€|wait, stop!" To my surprise, he listened â€" in all his rough manhandling, my helmet had gotten torn off. And it was Snotlout's helmet. I didn't want to leave it behind for anything. I practically slithered my way over to it, grabbing it up again.

"It's a helmet," Alvin replied stonily, promptly beginning to drag me again. "How much sentimental value can be in it?"

I glared at him with as much venom as I could muster, but we had reached our destination now; Astrid, Fishlegs, our dragons, Dad, Gobber, and for some strange reason, Eret and Ruffnut and Tuffnut were all gathered there, their hands bound, each one watched by a heavily armed Outcast.

"Ruff, Tuff!" I called, wishing I could run to them. "What are you guys doing here?"

"Oh, about thatâ€|" Ruffnut shrugged. "I meant to ask you what Nightmare duty was, only I forgot until we were already gone. We

decided to turn back around and ask you, only we ended up arguing, so I had to hit him, and by the time we got back to where you guys were, you were gone."

I tried not to groan in frustration at them, and Alvin quickly recaptured my attention.

"Hiccup," he gave me a cuff around the head, which hurt badly enough on a regular day, but seeing as one of his men had recently knocked me unconscious, it hurt even worse. "In case you hadn't noticed, you have something I want. Or, more like, you can find something I want."

"I won't help you." I tried to sound braver than I felt. I needed to be brave for the people in front of me. They all looked so terrified.

Alvin dropped me on the ground and began to circle me, making me feel even more vulnerable. "I thought you might say that," he nodded. As quick as thought, he had grabbed Fishlegs from his Outcast guard and pinned him, a knife at the blonde boy's throat. "So I decided to give you a bit of motivation. For every time you defy me today, I'll kill somebody you see gathered here."

_Toothless. _Dad, Gobber, Astrid, Fishlegs, people I could barely remember. Ruffnut and Tuffnut, too stupid and well-meaning to ever stay away.

"Understand?"

I met his eyes. This wasn't a joke. He wasn't playing around. I could read his thoughts, as clearly as if they were written on his face. He had checkmated me.

30. Nameless King

Unbreakable

_The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'. _

Chapter 30: Nameless King

**A/N: Ooh, is this another plot and character I see forming here? :D Oh, yes, I believe it is :DDDD I really can't wait to just start ripping out you guys' hearts, but unfortunately the plot comes first xD even before angst, and I can't believe I just said that. Anyway, I'm hungry. Like, wow, I'm seriously really hungry, so I'm gonna sign off here and grab something to eat. Food. It calls. And, as I haven't stuffed this AN with enough random facts about my day, I've also been listening to Evanescence a lot today. :D I forgot how amazing they are. I don't listen to them as often as I used to. Oh, but I took a break from Evanescence earlier to play Where No One Goes instead. That song is perfection and Hiccup and Toothless in canon are perfection. :3 Oh, and I watched The Sorcerer's Apprentice for the first time last night. It was good, but I probably wouldn't have liked it as much as I did if Jay hadn't been playing the main guy. "A figurative urn of ridicule!" xD xD xD XD also, I'm crazy about

fantasy, so it was a good thing for me, I think :3 Anyway, goodbye! I must leave to get food :D **

* * *

><p>Alvin stared at me for a few minutes, like he was awaiting my decree, or waiting for me to try and run away or something. I couldn't run with only one leg, and more than that, leaving and abandoning everyone here, everyone who had done so much for me? It wasn't just unforgivable â€" it was unthinkable. For a moment, we just stared at each other, Alvin and I, his knife at Fishlegs' throat, his gaze quite a bit higher than mine due to the fact that he was standing and I was sitting.<p>

I still couldn't really accept what was going on. Alvin had everyone who had ever been nice to me â€" everyone that I could remember, and who hadn't given their lives for me, and he was planning to change that if I didn't cooperate with him.

I'd always thought of Alvin as a cold-hearted man; thought maybe that this was why he was such a good Viking.

But now I saw within him a brutality of the likes of which I had never seen, the cold and calculated cruelty of a man who's ready to kill everyone in his path. I'd glimpsed this nature within Eret, too, the readiness to murder at a moment's notice. It had scared me then, too, but only now did I register how truly awful it really was, and only now did it terrify me.

Alvin's smile was as cold as my blood after the realization. "Well, Hiccup? Will you comply?"

The knife was dangerously close to Fishlegs' throat. I squeezed my eyes shut.

"Yes." My voice was very quiet.

"No, Hiccup!"

"Hiccup, you can't do that!"

It didn't matter who said the words â€" it still hurt, either way. These people depended on me to be, in this moment, infallible. Unbreakable. And I wasn't.

And if I chose to fight Alvin and become King, it would be like this all the time. People would need me more than ever, they'd need me to have an unbreakable steel center. Andâ€|and I didn't have that. I couldn't be unbreakable. I wasn't unbreakable.

I swallowed, keeping my eyes trained on the dirt. Alvin released Fishlegs â€" I could hear the blonde boy letting out a cry of startled pain at the roughness. My stomach clenched at the sound. Another reason why I couldn't be King: if Alvin couldn't have me, he'd go for the people around me. And that was something I couldn't let happen. If that meant surrendering completely to Alvin, then that's what it meant.

He knelt down next to me, surprisingly close. Closer than I expected. "Where is it?"

"Where's what?" I sincerely hoped that Alvin understood that I wasn't exactly a compass for the Lost Things, and that I wasn't going to point him in the direction of them. Mostly, I just found them by accident.

"Don't play dumb with me," he sneered. "I know you stole the Dragon Jewel."

"What?" My head spun, but suddenly everything made sense. Dad and Gobber must have stolen the Jewel when Alvin wasn't looking, but found a temporary hiding place for it. Alvin and the witch chalked it up to me, though how they'd managed to work that one out, I wasn't sure.

But Dad and Gobber depended on me to act like I didn't know anything. So I blinked at him for a couple seconds, pretending I was totally lost. "Alvin, you know I already dug up the Dragon Jewel, and escaped from your island the night after. I didn't stick around long enough to steal anything."

Alvin looked furious. "But you stole it!" he protested. "You stole it, and sent Stoick and an oaf to distract us while you did!"

"Alvin, really," I tried to sound as politely indignant as I could. "What use would I have for it? I don't want to be King, you know that. Do you want me to try and find the Jewel for you again? I really don't know where it is this time, and I have no use for it."

Alvin opened his mouth. Then he closed it again. This went on for awhile, just him opening and closing his mouth like a guppy as he struggled to think of what to say. Finally, he handled the situation by saying rather gruffly, "Alright, you little accident, you're going to find me something else, then."

I widened my eyes innocently, blinking up at him like I couldn't even imagine what he was talking about. But the whole time he spoke to me, I was frantically running through the Lost Things in my mind. _The arrowâ€|he already has thatâ€|the ticking-thing, he has thatâ€|the key, he's got thatâ€|the Throneâ€|the Crownâ€|I don't know where those two things areâ€|he's already got the Jewelâ€|the fang-free dragonâ€| _My heart clenched as my thoughts shifted to Toothless, but there was also a certain amount of relief there as well, when I realized my dragon would not be hurt.

So what was left, then? I struggled to recall the prophecy Eret had recited to me in his tree hideout. It felt like a lifetime ago that that had happened. The ruby heart's stoneâ€|my mind flitted to the golden dragon bracelet concealed safely in my vest. Would Alvin search me for Lost Things, if he couldn't find the bracelet? The idea made me grow cold. I didn't care so much about myself, but then, it wasn't myself I was thinking of in that moment. I thought of Humongous, now just a lifeless body on a beach somewhere, probably carried away by the tide now. I'd left him there, and the only thing I had to show for him was a golden bracelet. I didn't ever want Alvin to get his hands on it.

I could see Alvin calculating the Lost Things in his head, too,

trying to think what he did have and what he didn't. Finally, he picked me up by the collar, setting me down roughly on the ground. "Walk," he ordered stonily.

I fell back down. "I can't," I told him. "Remember?"

He growled something incoherent.

"Well, if you'd give me my leg back," I started, possibly about to make a sarcastic comment or a fantastic case for myself, either one. But Alvin interrupted me before I got that far, cuffing me around the head again.

I tried my hardest not to wince, but it hardly mattered; everyone's eyes were fixed on Alvin. Fishlegs still had a hand on his throat, like he was recalling the cruel touch of the knife on his skin, but when he removed his hand, I saw a few blood droplets there. My stomach churned. Alvin had drawn blood.

Before I could do anything, the Outcast chieftain grabbed me up by my collar, beginning to drag me along again. "Find me the Things."

"You're going to have to be a little more specific than that," I told him.

The blow came so fast that I almost cried out, but I held my tongue at the last second. And I was glad that I had, because I could see Dad standing next to Gobber, beginning to struggle against his chains when Alvin hit me. I caught his eye and shook my head. No need for him to overreact. I was going to get him and everyone else out of here. I just needed time to formulate a plan.

"Fine, then," Alvin seethed, speaking between gritted teeth, "find me the Throne."

I held his gaze for half a second longer than I should have, already trying to work this out. Where could the Throne be, anyway? Eret had never given me any hints as to that. I swallowed. "Okay. Well, then, I need my leg back."

Alvin's eyes narrowed. "I'm making the rules hereâ€"

"I don't mean it like that. I need my leg because I can't have people touching me," I tried to keep my face as clear and blank as possible when I spoke. "That disrupts the atmosphere of my state of being, and when that happens, the Lost Things are hidden even from me." I hoped that if I mixed that in there, Alvin would be confused enough to believe my lie. He frowned at me. Damn it, he wasn't buying it.

Just when I expected another blow for my lies, just when I squeezed my eyes shut and turned my face away, preparing myself to take it on the cheek, I heard Alvin's voice. "Give him back his leg," he ordered one of the Outcasts behind me, and I heard the other man stumbling around in his haste to obey. I opened my eyes again, watching the scene play out. I breathed so much easier when the cool metal contraption was in my hands once again. I considered trying to hit somebody with it and free us that way, but the ratio of Outcasts to Hooligans wasn't good. They outnumbered us, five to one.

I slipped the prosthetic on, buckling it around the scarred stump, breathing a sigh of relief. At least I could walk again. I felt so vulnerable with Alvin dragging me everywhere, and this gave me some semblance of power. I was on my feet moments after doing up the last buckle, surveying Alvin.

The Outcast chieftain raised his bushy eyebrows at me. "Well? Aren't you going to go find me the Throne?"

"It's not on this island," I hoped I was right.

Alvin frowned. "That can't be true. He promised us that there was a Lost Thing hereâ€¦something importantâ€¦"

"He?" I unconsciously leaned closer to Alvin, my heart beating hard in my chest. There was somebody else involved in this, somebody else who knew the location of the Lost Thingsâ€¦oh, if only he was the true King, then I could give up without surrendering everyone I cared about to Alvin's dangerous clutches.

"What's it to you?" Alvin was suddenly aggressive again, his face inches from mine. I tried my hardest not to flinch or show fear.

"Nothing," I responded quietly, flicking my eyes down again, to study the dirt. If I could find this other King, and convince him to become King of the Wilderwest in my steadâ€¦but I didn't really have much to go on, aside from the fact that he apparently knew Alvin, and knew where one of the Lost Things was hidden. The first morsel of information didn't do wonders for my faith in this nameless King.

"Now," Alvin leaned even closer to me, bridging the tiny gap of distance between us and forcing my chin upward with his dirty hand, "find me the Throne."

31. Search

Unbreakable

_The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'. _

Chapter 31: Search

**A/N: Hi, guys! Sorry for taking such a long break, but I kind of got bored of this AU. However, my spark for it has been re-ignited! :D So, that should help some with the lack of updates, huh? But I'll try not to update too much xD I don't want people getting tired of this story, either, much as I don't want them to forget about it. Anyway, I hope you enjoy this chapter. I enjoyed writing it a little too much xD Hiccup's intense angst makes me too happy xD **

* * *

><p>"Find me the Throne."

Alvin's words echoed in my head, and my gaze flitted to the others,

standing in a bedraggled, frightened line, surrounded by Outcast guards. Astrid's hands were tied behind her back, there was a smear of dirt on her cheek, but her chin was steady and her blue gaze was hard and defiant. Fishlegs, poor, sweet, scared Fishlegs, stood shaking and trembling, a great mass of a misfit Viking, his hair a mess. Ruffnut and Tuffnut came next, trying to shove each other, even when their hands were tied. They weren't scared at all, but only because they were too brave, too stupid, to realize the magnitude of what was going on. And then came Eret, the man I'd left behind, to the mercy of the Outcasts. There was a streak of dried blood, running from his temple to his chin, but he glared at Alvin coolly; there was no fear in his face. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking.

Dad was glaring at Alvin, too, but in his case, this said a lot more. Although Eret was intimidating enough, Dad was just downright scary. His beard was a little worse for the wear and there was a bruise swelling on his cheek, but he looked every inch a chief. Gobber had the same expression as Dad and Eret: murderous and proud. Though they'd been captured, they hadn't lost their courage. My bravery was only skin-deep; if Alvin ever made it below the surface, he'd know just how close he'd come to breaking me.

That was another reason why I could never be King of the Wilderwest: I wasn't brave at all. Half the time, I was just sort of pretending not to be scared. I wasn't as fearless as I pretended to be.

Remembering Alvin's words, and my earlier lies, I frowned at him. "It's not on this island, remember?" I sincerely hoped I was right in this assumption; that would be really awkward if the Throne just popped up right after I'd been lying my head off that it wasn't here.

Alvin bared his teeth in a grim snarl, already beginning to threaten me, but my attention was captured instead by the sky; a loud rumble of thunder sounded above us, and when I glanced up, I saw dark clouds moving in.

"Will he be able to find the Lost Things during a storm?" Savage was instantly at Alvin's side, speaking in a low voice.

Alvin leveled a glare at me. "If you start bawling, and stop looking," his voice was sharper than a knife's blade, "I'll beat you until you wish you were _dead_."

I couldn't help but shudder, but almost instantly, I straightened my back. Yes, I was still as scared of thunderstorms as I had been in the past, but there was no room for fear here anymore. I could only be afraid for my friends right now.

"I'll find you the Lost Thing we're looking for," I spoke as firmly as I could, even while lightning cracked overhead, sending my heart pounding in a rapid rhythm.

The dark water churned on the beach in front of us, and I felt a quiet kind of tug, gently pulling me towards that dark water. I was right in thinking that whatever we were searching for wasn't on the island; it was in the water.

But what, then? Swim down there and get it? I couldn't very well do that, could I? I didn't even know how to swim, and I didn't know how deep the water was, or where the Lost Thing even was. For all I knew, it could be miles below that dark, frothing water, and I would drown before I even got to it. And I had to stay alive, at least for now. The others depended on me. I'd never known anybody to depend on me before, except Toothless, in rare instances. And if I became King, people would depend on me all the time. I could barely depend on myself, so it was no use becoming King.

I turned to Alvin, wondering how much to tell him. I'd figured out the location of the Lost Thing, but I sure as hell didn't want to be sent down there, into the dark waters during a thunderstorm. Lightning was attracted to water, for one, and for another, I couldn't swim and I didn't have very good night vision. I depended solely on Toothless for that.

The Outcast chieftain raised his eyebrows coolly at me, waiting for me to speak. He must have read the expression on my face, and correctly guessed why I was hesitating, because his hand crept out, grabbing Ruffnut's braids and dragging her to the front. "You've found something, hmm? Would you like to expound upon that?"

Ruffnut tried to jerk away from him, kicking him in the shins. "Ow!" she screeched. "Stop it, you're pulling on my hair!"

"Hey!" Tuffnut's voice sounded strangled; even in the dim lighting, I could see that he was flushed with anger. "Get your hands off her!"

"No, stop!" My voice rose and I ran at Alvin, trying feebly to claw him away from Ruffnut. I couldn't stand to watch him threatening her, even if I didn't know her that well. But I just knew I'd break completely if I lost anyone else I cared about just then.

Alvin held Ruffnut up higher, easily out of my reach, and easily out of Tuffnut's, too. Don't think the others weren't trying, though; they just weren't doing a very good job.

I squeezed my eyes shut, unable to think of a convincing lie. I just needed him to stop hurting her. "It's under the water," I blurted. "I don't know how, or why, but it's under there somewhere." I hadn't even seen it for myself, but I knew it was down there, I felt it like a sixth sense.

Alvin's eyes widened in surprise; he let Ruffnut drop to the ground, and glared at me for a second. "You're sure? It's down there?"

"Iâ€¦I don't know what it is," I admitted, terrified into talking. "I don't even know where it is down there, but it's down there somewhere."

He frowned at me, his hands straying dangerously close to where Ruffnut lay. I was surprised to see Tuffnut kneeling next to her, displaying a kind of gentleness I'd never seen before.

"I'm telling the truth!" My voice rose into a terrified squeak. "Just let me prove it, Iâ€¦"

"Alright." Alvin raised his hands again, snapping his fingers. One of the Outcasts stumbled forward, tripping all over himself to help. "Get me a rope," he commanded the man, and as the man, his hands shaking, stumbled to obey, I was hit by a sudden flash of recognition. I knew that Outcast, better than I thought I did. Halfdan. It was true that he'd grown taller, more muscular, and his black hair was long and shaggy, but it was undoubtedly the kid who'd made my life hell for twelve years, before Alvin did that all himself.

He'd grown so much, he really could be classified as a man now. I watched him walk away, shocked out of my fear, but Alvin quickly brought me back to the moment with a cuff around the head. "Here's the deal," he snarled, "I'm going to lower you into the water on a rope, got it?"

I nodded before realizing what he was saying. "Hey, wait a sec, umâ€¦I can't breathe underwater," I pointed out logically.

"Every few minutes," Alvin replied calmly, "I will pull you up. You will be lowered into the water seven times, and if, by the end of those seven submersions, you still haven't located it, I'm going to assume you are lying, and I will kill every Hooligan on this beach."

"Well, I feel so excluded," Eret spoke up sarcastically. "A redheaded stepchild, in fact. Positively unloved. Don't I count, too? Won't I get killed, too?"

Alvin swung around to hit him, effectively shutting him up. My blood boiled at the sight of the welt on Eret's cheek, and I clenched my hands into fists to stop them from shaking. Halfdan brought the rope, and when Alvin gestured to me, he started tying it around my waist. His movements were jerky and robotic, his hands shaking as he fumbled to tie an acceptable knot.

Alvin nodded his approval and the young man sighed in relief. I saw his white, shaking hands relax.

"Any funny business," Alvin continued, "if I feel so much as a single tug on that rope, I will also kill every Hooliganâ€¦"every person you are even remotely connected to," he amended, glaring at Eret, who had opened his mouth. "Got it?"

I felt my limbs shaking, the thunder rumbling above me and the threats right in front of me and the dark water below me. How could I get us all out of this?

But I managed a shaky nod, even though I was absolutely terrified.

"Good." Alvin neatly knotted the rope around his dirty wrist, closing the distance between us and beginning to lower me into the water, slowly, steadily. I scrabbled for purchase, my fingers finding sand before Alvin kicked my hands off, to join the rest of me in the water. I was submerged up to my chest now, and this water was a lot colder than I thought it would be. I was shivering already, and I'd only been in for ten seconds. It soaked me to the skin, and the lightning was striking dangerously close now.

But I knew what I had to do, so I took a deep breath, swearing to myself that I would get that Lost Thing up from the bottom of the ocean if I had to, if it meant saving my friends, and everyone I cared about.

32. Upper Hand

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 32: Upper Hand

****A/N:** I experimented a little bit with this chapter, which was difficult. I wanted to show the reader the depth of Hiccup's fear, instead of telling them, but I'm not so sure I achieved that. I'm not very good at showing things - it'd really be easier if the mark of a good writer was telling. Anyway, whoo! :D *in Kuzco's voice from the Emperor's New Groove* Look at me and my bad self! We're at fifty thousand words! :D Uh-huh! Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh! Oh, gosh, I'm too excited for this xD I actually have most of the rest of this story all planned out and literally written in my head. The hard part isn't really 'what comes next?' The hard part is figuring out how to arrange these scenes to set off chain reactions. Like, Eret threatens Hiccup with his knife, Hiccup pities him and shows him how to train a dragon. Eret reacts to this by offering Hiccup shelter and care, and trusting him more. They learn to like each other so much that Eret even sacrifices himself for Hiccup. And it was all set off because of Hiccup's pity all the way back in chapter 6, coupled with his love of dragons. ******

****I** originally had such a different outline for this story and when Eret entered I was like oh my gosh what the heck am I doing Eret doesn't belong in this story! xD and now I love him. Like, I love him in canon, but I didn't enjoy him as much in this fic until he got captured by Outcasts because TORTURE xD seriously why aren't there more Eret torture fics in the fandom? D: I need to write one, but I suppose Far Less Understanding does count as torture, but it's not graphic or intense or drawn out or anything, the way I like it to be. Mostly because I think Alvin is more the type for torture than Drago is. Hence, this story xD legit, Drago strikes me as the kind of person who would just be so annoyed by incompetent minions and sassy teenage boys that he'd just kill everybody, but Alvin is like meh I'll torture them to control my rage xD Oh, wowza, sorry, long AN. ******

* * *

><p>I was shaking before I was even fully submerged; my hands looked small and white when I stared down at them, trembling uncontrollably from cold and terror.<p>

I remembered to draw in a breath without letting it out just before my head broke the dark, salty surface of the water, and I was left in the endless ocean.

Remembering my mission, I glanced madly around, splashing clumsily

over to the right, feeling around in the darkness to see if I could find anything. My hands found only empty ocean, and my lungs started to burn. I was suddenly and uncomfortably aware of my need to breathe.

"Every few minutes," Alvin had said. I had only been down here for thirty seconds, at most, and I already felt like I needed air. I could feel my heart pounding crazily, desiring oxygen.

Oh, gods, it was terrifying. It all welled up suddenly, the fact that I was floating in endless, cold darkness, completely alone, that Alvin was threatening my friends and my real father, that he might not pull me up after all. Oh, god, oh, god, oh, god, I just wanted _out_. I clawed feebly at the rope tied around my waist, but I couldn't figure out the knots in the darkness. I needed to breathe, and then maybe I could focus on the rope. I was already feeling light-headed, beginning to get dizzy, and my head throbbed painfully every time I tried to think. Oh, gods, I just wanted to _breathe_.

I could feel my limbs getting heavier, panic clouding my brain as I struggled to kick myself up to the surface, but how could I make it up when I'd never even learned how to swim? My lungs begged for air, and I tugged madly on the rope. _Oh, gods, pleaseâ€|Alvin, don't let me die here, pleaseâ€|I don't want to die hereâ€| _

The rope tightened around my waist, and terror shot through me. Alvin had obviously felt my tug, but what was he doing now?

The water was shifting endlessly around me, and someone was tugging on that rope, relentlessly unsympathetic.

I made it to the surface, kicking and splashing. Cold air, cold, sweet, wonderful air, stung my face as I inhaled, gasping and panting for breath, practically crying in relief. I could breathe again.

I was so cold that everything hurt, and every breath stung my nose and mouth, but I didn't care; breathing was so wonderful, and I took it for granted so muchâ€|

I rested my hands momentarily on the wet, gritty sand again, gulping down air like these breaths would be my last. Alvin was suddenly next to me, kneeling down, grabbing my chin, forcing it upward.

I locked eyes with Astrid on my way up. Her eyes were wide with terror, not for herself, but for me. Shame encompassed my gratitude. Astrid shouldn't have been scared for me â€" I should have been thinking up a plan to get us out of here, not panicking because of a little water.

"Well?" Alvin demanded sharply, shaking me a little to get answers faster. "What did you find?"

"N-nothing," I managed through chattering teeth; the water was so cold, and the rain from up above was unforgiving and harsh, splashing on my skin like missiles. "Iâ€|I couldn't, itâ€|it was too dark to see down thereâ€|"

"Oh, I'm sorry." Sarcasm dripped from every word of Alvin's reply. "I'm sorry that you're too frightened of the dark toâ€"

"I'm not frightened!" I declared, which wasn't really true. I was so terrified I could barely think, but it wasn't the dark that terrified me. "All I'm saying is that it was too hard to see!"

"You're already giving up?" Alvin's eyes widened, and then his brows drew down into a scowl.

"No!"

"Good!" he snapped. "Get down there while I'm still in a forgiving mood, otherwise I might just leave you down there!"

"No, no, wait!" My voice rose higher as he started shifting the rope, getting ready to toss me back to the mercy of the ocean. The idea filled me with panicky dread.

"What do you mean, '_wait_'?" Alvin's lip curled.

"Justâ€¦|just give me a minute," I pleaded, my mind reeling, no longer able to control or suppress my shudders. I put my hands on my upper arms, not sure whether I was trying to warm myself or simply trying to hold myself together so I wouldn't fall apart.

Alvin's eyes narrowed. "You were down there for a _minute_," he spat. "_Sixty seconds_, Hiccup. Are you so weak that you can't handle being underwater for sixty seconds?"

I felt my face flush as a few of the Outcasts began laughing harshly, and, looking beyond them, I noticed Astrid again. She looked angry now, but still afraid, and I caught myself just before Alvin threw me under again. I couldn't afford to get sidetracked by my own weaknesses. Astrid needed me. There were people up there who needed me. I didn't matter so much on my own, but if I could just get everyone I loved to safety, this wouldn't have been a complete waste of time.

I glanced around in the dark water, kicking my feet endlessly just to try and get somewhere. I brushed by some seaweed, and I thought I saw a few fish gaping at me at one point, probably wondering what I was doing in their water, but I ignored them. An idea was taking shape in my mind, and, if I could just execute it properly, we might all make it out of here alive, even me.

I reached out in the dark again, finding something smooth, with slightly sharp edges, something that didn't belong underwater. I drew back in surprise, but quickly returned to the spot, ignoring the burning in my lungs. I considered tugging on the rope to alert Alvin to my necessities, as I had last time, but at the last second, I turned back to keep inspecting what I'd found. I'd rather drown down here, I decided, than ever ask Alvin for assistance again.

I ran my fingers along the edge of the item I'd located again, trying to decide what it was without looking at it. It was definitely something cast away, something long forgotten and half-buried in the sand. It might be one of the Lost Things we were searching for.

The rope tightened around my waist again, and I was dragged upward, where air and rain greeted me. I drew in a deep breath, watching as Alvin paced the sand agitatedly. Without waiting for him to start questioning me, I caught Astrid's eye over his shoulder, shot her a

reassuring smile and then locked gazes with Dad instead. He was wet from the rain, but he didn't look cold or scared, just angry. Furious, in fact. He was still struggling to get out of his chains, and his eyes were narrowed.

I waited for him to realize that I was looking at him, and when he did, I mouthed one word at him, praying he'd understand. And then I jerked my head at the water.

A shadow of something that might have been a smile flickered across his face, and he nodded. He'd understood.

Even though Alvin had a rope tied around my waist, even though I couldn't escape him like this, I knew what would help us. It might have looked like he had the upper hand, but now, I did.

33. If You're Sure

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 33: If You're Sure

****A/N: Action. My worst enemy. I swear, I don't even know if this chapter's any good, but I will let you guys decide that. It's 2,000 words, though, that oughta count for something. So, anyway, this is chapter 33, and chapter 34 should be up very soon. The plot is thickening, eh? Eh? Well, even if it's not, I hope you guys enjoy this newest installment. And forgive me for my horrible action scenes. ****

* * *

><p>When I rose up for the third time, I was surprised to see my plan was working out even better than I thought it would. Dad had slipped out of his chains, Halfdan's key ring was missing, and Astrid was holding it, currently undoing her own handcuffs. When she saw me, her face broke out into a wide smile, and I couldn't help but feel a sudden, soaring sense of accomplishment. I'd replaced Astrid's fear with hope.<p>

None of the Outcasts appeared any the wiser, so I was careful to erase all signs of triumph from my face before looking at them. I'd managed to get the sharp-edged, awkward object up out of the sand it was buried in, but I still couldn't really figure out what it was, not in the dark. I'd need light for that.

When Alvin started demanding answers about my latest underwater search, I'd already chosen what I was going to say. "I think I've found something, but I can't tell what it is in the dark." Because there always had to be a Plan B, always. I could not let another's safety dangle by a thread. I allowed my eyes to drift over to the others again — Astrid had tossed the key ring to the twins, and they were currently arguing with it, each one wanting to be the first to break out of their chains.

"What? What is it? Small, or large? Heavy, or light?" Alvin's hot, rapid breath and excited voice were so loud and forceful to me. I instinctively cringed away from him and his excitement, because anything that pleased him so immensely just couldn't be good.

"I don't know," I repeated, "I can't tell what it is in the dark. But it's large, whatever it is, and it's really, really heavy."

Alvin's eyes narrowed. Considering. Thinking. I swallowed, waiting for the verdict.

"Boy," his voice was still a growling nightmare on my ears, "I think you've found me the Throne. Get it up here. Quickly."

"It's not going to be that easy," I told him, mustering up the last remnants of my courage and glaring at him. "I told you, it's heavy. In case you haven't noticed, I'm not exactly the best candidate for hauling heavy things upward." I gestured to myself, my skinny arms, my thin chest.

He scowled. "Look here, Hiccup, you're the only candidate for the job. So if you don't get me that Throne, I'll give you such a beating you'll wish you'd never been born." As if he thought he hadn't ever made me wish that before. I longed to say something along those lines to him, but the secret was compliance. Always compliance.

So I bit my tongue, even as I caught Dad creeping slowly back over to the group, leading his accomplice. Gobber and Astrid were unlocking Toothless' chains to free him, but I knew even after my dragon was freed, things weren't going to be that easy. I'd crafted a plan that would get us away and buy us ten minutes, at most, before Alvin was after me again, and it all depended on him not noticing our escape until we were in the clear.

I nodded at Alvin, trying to inject the right amount of fear in my face to fool him into thinking I was scared. He knew the terror I normally felt whenever he so much as moved, even if it wasn't to hit me. He would find it suspicious if I didn't react to a threat. So I nodded and screwed up my face and wondered if I looked as I normally looked when I was afraid, but now that there was hope mixing with the fear, it was hard to tell. Alvin lowered me back into the water, slowly, carefully. It was like, despite his threats, he was afraid of hurting me. The water engulfed me all at once, freezing me through my clothes, making me shiver, there in the darkness. I kicked and splashed out, feeling around for the Throne again, my fingers finding cool wood. Now that it was out of the sand, I figured it'd be a lot easier to haul up, but at the same time, my weight plus the Throne might be too much for Alvin to handleâ€¦

I scrutinized the Throne, as best as I could in the darkness, and the water suddenly shifted around me, the atmosphere changing as something new entered the ocean. Recognizing the silhouette of the blue Thunderdrum Dad and Gobber had ridden to Outcast Island, I smiled triumphantly as the beautiful creature swam toward me, pressing his mouth, full of jagged teeth, gently against my nose and mouth, and breathed.

Oxygen flooded my lungs, and for a moment I just reveled in the wonder of breathing underwater, until I met the creature's yellow eyes, glowing in the darkness of the deep sea and telling me that I

wasn't in the clear yet. I still had other people to think about, and of course Toothless had to make it out safely. Not to mention I didn't know if the Thunderdrum could handle keeping seven people supplied with oxygenâ€¦

The rope tightened around my waist, and for a moment, I scrambled to hold onto the Throne, as if thinking that it could keep me breathing as well as the Thunderdrum could. But I was dragged upward anyway, through the ocean and into the cold, rainy air, back to Alvin.

Well, this was good, too, I decided, taking a couple deep breaths. I still needed to let the others know about Phase Two of my plan, considering Phase One had gone so smoothly. But when I saw the beach, I knew then that Phase Two wasn't going smoothly at all. The Outcasts had cottoned on to the others trying to escape behind them, and everyone was fighting for all they were worth. At least the others had freed their dragons, and the dragons were fighting alongside the Hooligans. The Thunderdrum floundered in the water, caught between brief loyalty and the promise of freedom.

I thought maybe I could intervene and get everyone safely away, but of course, it didn't work out that way. An Outcast saw me coming, and threw a knife in my general direction. Well, the knife didn't hurt me, but it did catch on my leggings, pinning me to the tree trunk and embedding itself deeply in the bark.

Oh. Perfect. Great. I actually thought I could do something useful, but you know, the gods really liked to destroy any chance of that ever happening. Just wonderful, really. I couldn't be better. I tried to bend down to grab at the knife, but the weapon pulled against my every movement. I groaned in frustration, reaching down without bending this time, grasped the hilt, and pulled.

Nothing happened. The knife stayed firmly stuck in the tree trunk, and Alvin's eyes locked onto me. He started elbowing people out of the way, whether friend or foe, and grabbed the knife out of my leggings, freeing me. So I did what came naturally. I kicked him in the face.

I don't think I actually hurt him at all, but he seemed so shocked by my action that I took the opportunity, sprinting away from him, into the battle. I wished I'd taken further advantage of his shock and grabbed the knife from him, too, because I was actually pretty good at throwing them. The best thing I could scrounge up was a heavy sword somebody had dropped in the heat of battle, and I thought I might accidentally impale myself with it, so I put it down again.

Spotting Astrid fighting Halfdan, I shouldered my way through the battle, trusting the confusion of the fight to keep me safe for now. "Astrid," I spoke low and quickly in her ear, lest anyone notice me lurking behind her, "get on your dragon and get away from here â€" as fast as you can, I'll be right behind you."

She turned to me, distracted out of the battle, and Halfdan took advantage of this to â€" run away? I watched his fleeing person with confused eyes. I guess Astrid was a lot more fearsome an opponent than I could ever have previously guessed.

"Look, tell the others to do the same as quickly as you can. Duck!" I

threw myself down on the ground, pulling her down with me as a spear swung over our heads, zooming past us and hitting Eret in the leg. I heard him give a sharp cry of pain, and then he was down, clutching at a badly bleeding leg. Astrid barely noticed him; she just kept staring at me after I'd risen back up, and before I could go to Eret, she grabbed my hand. "You're coming with us, right?"

"Yes." Well, it wasn't the first promise I'd made without knowing whether I could keep it, and it wouldn't be the last. I yanked my hand out of hers and ran to Eret as a Viking man I didn't recognize leapt through the battle, yelling to Alvin, "Stop this insanity at once! The slaves are getting restless!"

"Eret, are you okay?"

But Eret wasn't listening to me; he was clutching at his leg, bright red blood oozing between his fingers, his teeth gritted in pain.

"Eret!"

"Yes," his reply was swift. "Yes, I'm okay."

"Can you walk?"

"â€|How far?"

"To your dragon. You need to get on your dragon, and fly somewhere safe, okay?"

He frowned, considering my words. "What about you?"

"I'm coming, too. Justâ€|c'mon, up." I helped him to his feet. His wrists were shaking as I held onto them.

It was a slow trek to where he insisted his dragon was â€" sure enough, the purple Nadder was lying there, apparently unbothered by the sounds of the raging battle, but when he spotted Eret, he drew himself up, snorting and snuffling with worry.

"He's okay," I assured the dragon, even though I myself wasn't sure about that. "Just fly himâ€|where should we go, Eret?" It was the first time I'd formulated a plan, and fallen back on somebody else for help.

But Eret was of no use. He was slumped over on the dragon's back, not yet passing out but very close. And damn it, there was nothing tying him in. If he passed out while we were ridingâ€|

"Okay, change of plans." I hauled Eret back off the Nadder, squinting around in the battle for Toothless and saying to the Nadder, "Just follow us wherever we go, okay? Wherever I take Eret, just follow him â€" honestly, Eret, this dragon found you, why didn't you let him take you home, or at least to Berk or something?" I fussed as I dragged the man along, trying not to let him get hurt.

Eret frowned, looking at me in confusion, mouth opening slightly as he tried to form words.

"Never mind," I forestalled him, ducking as a knife flew past. I

didn't want to end up pinned to another tree. Forcing him onto Toothless seemed to work, but that was the end of my luck: the battle had ceased, and Alvin caught sight of me again. The others were breaking formation, scattering, everyone checking to make sure everyone else was safe. Dad and Gobber were settled on the blue Thunderdrum, Ruffnut and Tuffnut had made it safely onto their Zippleback, Astrid was seated on her Deadly Nadder, and Fishlegs was on his Gronckle. The purple Nadder and Hookfang had no riders.

I turned my gaze from Hookfang's empty saddle, swinging one leg over Toothless' back as the barrage of weapons began. The Outcasts were throwing everything they had at us, despite the man from before yelling at them to stop. A knife grazed the back of my hand, and I winced as Toothless snapped out his wings.

"Alright, bud, can you do this?"

He snorted, indignant at the fact that I doubted his abilities.

"If you're sure," I responded. I pressed down the pedal, and we rose up into the black sky, flashing with lightning, pursued by a hail of arrows.

34. Escape to Safety

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 34: Escape to Safety

**A/N: Well, I am back. Again. With a new chapter. I think this pushes me over sixty k, but it might not. But it's long. And it's the start of... *drum roll* tension! I love Hiccup/Stoick arguments, and as this chapter ended on an unresolved one, I thought it'd be good. I'm really liking their fights, and the distance between them. **

* * *

><p>Looking back, it was a kind of miracle I survived that. I was riding with Eret practically passed out, leaning on my shoulder, and blood was trickling freely out of the back of my hand, where somebody had grazed me with a knife. To top it off, the shoulder Eret had chosen to lean on was my bad shoulder, and Toothless depended partly on me to steer him, due to his tailfin. So, in hindsight, we really shouldn't have survived that.<p>

The arrows were shot in synchronized volleys, so about every three seconds, they took a breath to notch new arrows, and take aim. I glanced around, sizing up the Outcast archers, and the way Stormfly was just a hair's breadth slower than she needed to be, just barely managing to dodge every arrow. The Thunderdrum and Gronckle were even slower and bulkier than Stormfly, and easier to see in the black sky due to their bright, vivid colors. Hookfang had already abandoned the rest of us, shooting off into the trees to avoid the arrows.

Wait â€" _the trees_.

It seemed so simple to me then that I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of it. "Guys, quick!" I hoped they could hear me over the wind. "Into the trees!" I plunged into the dark wood, Toothless swerving along at breakneck speed, unable to spare Eret even an ounce of pain; I heard him grunting behind me each time the wild ride jolted him.

I couldn't glance behind me for longer than a second, but that second was all the confirmation I needed — the others appeared to have joined me, even though they were miles behind us. The moment I looked forward again, I nearly paid a heavy price for my distraction; a thick tree was coming up fast, and I barely had time to press sharply down on the tailfin, partly guiding us out of the way.

But even with the danger of riding on a dragon's back through a thick, dark forest, we were safe from the arrows. Even the Outcasts who'd launched spears and knives at us couldn't reach us here; it was impossible to see Toothless and I, at least, disguised as we were by the darkness.

Yet with every second that passed, I expected pain. We would swerve around a tree, and even when we were in the clear, I kept expecting to hear a sickening crack, and feel my bones break beneath the skin. Pure instinct and adrenaline kept me madly pressing down the tailfin, sometimes extending it, sometimes narrowing it, occasionally only a centimeter away from a tree trunk before we flew away from it, but always, we stayed unhurt, unscathed. The forest seemed to go on forever, just one vast expanse of dark trees after another, until at last, we reached the end of the wood, quite suddenly.

Toothless immediately ascended, expecting more arrows and spears, but none came. The Outcasts must currently be stumbling around in the forest, looking for us. We pulled up above the clouds, and even here, rain pelted me relentlessly, thunder rumbling from all sides, louder and louder the closer we drew to the eye of the storm. Toothless steered us as best he could away from the storm, but the wind kept buffeting him backward, making it hard to get away.

My hands, frozen and numb from the cold rain, were clenched into tight fists around his reins as I tried to talk myself into doing something useful. I had just been forcibly submerged into the ocean four times, and come face-to-face, once again, with the scariest guy in the Archipelago. How could I possibly still feel a thrill of fear whenever lightning flashed, dangerously close?

I gently nudged Toothless in the side with my heel, and maybe he could feel me shaking, because he paused for just a moment, and I could hear him moaning and crooning softly, trying to comfort me, in the midst of all this. He knew exactly what was wrong with me, but instead of expressing his disbelief that I could still be afraid of a little thunder and lightning, he was trying to make it better for me. That dragon had surprised me before, but I was definitely surprised now. I wrapped my arms around his neck slowly, resting my head against his, his glistening scales cool and dry against my cheek.

I would like to say that I rose up again and attempted to help, but I didn't. Toothless gave a little moan in his throat, wordlessly telling me to stay down. I had been on the point of rising, returning to my task, but at his message, I slowly relaxed again, clinging to

him tightly as rainwater streaked down my face like tears. I might have been crying, too â€" I couldn't tell.

Toothless guided us all the way through that, although occasionally, he did rely on me to snap out the tailfin, or steer us around a particularly windy patch of cloud. I didn't even know if the others had followed me, if they'd made it out okay. I just kept lying there, depending entirely on Toothless to get me through each breath, because every breath brought the threat of hyperventilation. As he finally outflowed the storm and the sky slowly began to clear, I buried my face in his neck, feeling Eret's weight against my back. It was all too much, all at once â€" the storm we had just flown through, the submersions and Alvin and his threats that made me shudder even now, the sudden worry for everyone else that I had been incapable of feeling during the storm and, most pressingly, Eret. His weight on me was a constant reminder of how many people depended on me right now. And I hadn't looked after them because I was scared.

"T-toothless," My voice came out weak and raspy, and I stuttered. My teeth were chattering slightly from the cold, which made it even harder to form coherent words, "weâ€|we have to go backâ€|the othersâ€|"

He made a small noise below me. _Are you crazy?! _

Guilt washed over me like an ocean wave. "You're right," I admitted softly, burying my face in his neck again. "I'm sorry, buddy. I know that was hard for you. Thank you for what you did."

For a moment, we flew in aimless circles as I tried to formulate a plan, one that included getting the others back but excluded flying into the storm again. Toothless didn't have it in him, and I couldn't subject myself to that terror a second time. I was just about to admit that I was all out of ideas, but something suddenly collided with me in midair, and would have knocked me out of the saddle if I hadn't been strapped in. Eret grunted in pain â€" he was still conscious enough to feel things, then, but he didn't seem able to articulate his thoughts.

"What theâ€|" I began, looking up at the shapeless thing zooming its way through the clouds. "Fishlegs!" Recognition and relief flooded me in equal measure as I rose suddenly to his height, watching as he careened about wildly on his Gronckle, struggling to stay upright in the saddle. "Fishlegs!"

"Storms apparently make her a little dizzy," he told me by way of explanation, just before they went plunging wildly through the clouds.

"Fishlegs!" I swerved after him, trying to avoid getting hit with the Gronckle's erratic tail. "Is everyone else okay? Has everyone else gotten out?"

"What? Oh! Oh, yeah, everyone else has gotten out, but they're in the storm now â€" Meatlug started acting funny halfway through, and we started going way too fast, but they're going slowly because they don't want to chance anythingâ€|!" His voice grew fainter as they started rapidly descending again.

When I fell in to fly beside them again, Meatlug appeared to have

regained her senses. She still appeared a little confused, but completely calm and happy, as usual. "Are they gonna be okay?" I asked Fishlegs. "Do they need any help?"

"We're definitely putting this in the Book of Dragons!" he told me happily, patting his Gronckle's head.

"Fishlegs," I snapped, "can you focus? Are the others okay? Do they need help getting through the storm? Can they see?"

"I don't know!" He looked scared at being put on the spot, but answered swiftly. "I told you, Meatlug started acting funny, I didn't really see what the others were up to."

For a moment, we drifted in the endless, foggy seascape, nothing but water and sky.

"Whatâ€¦what are we going to do, Hiccup?"

The question worked at my already frayed nerves, and I suddenly wanted to yell at Fishlegs, tell him to quit looking to me every time he needed help. I opened my mouth in my frustration, my sudden anger, and just as quickly, I closed it again. He looked so helpless and lost at that moment, because despite his bulk and smarts, he really was currently just a kid who'd barely escaped the clutches of Alvin the Treacherous. He was scared, because he didn't know where we were going next, or if we were going to be safe there. I swallowed my angry retort. I couldn't yell at him when he needed my reassurance so badly. "I'll figure something out, Fishlegs," I replied tiredly, as a Deadly Nadder came flying out of the fog, and the storm behind us, Astrid astride her.

The twins, Dad, Gobber, and the pale purple Nadder followed close behind, but the Nadder was a frantic mess of worry and panic, flying as close to Toothless as he could and nuzzling Eret worriedly. The man behind me smiled a little at the touch of the dragon's nose upon his head, and he raised his head tiredly, at last, though his leg still left a trail of blood behind us.

Dad took control of the situation immediately, and I don't think I'd ever appreciated that he was a born leader more than I did then â€" for about two seconds, anyway. "Alright," he yelled, even though there was no wind anymore. Now that we'd flown out of the storm, it was calm as could be. "We'll loop back around the island once, and head back to Berkâ€"

"Wait," I interrupted, my appreciation for him vanishing as quickly as it had come. "That's not a good idea."

Dad frowned thunderously at me, and for a second, I thought he was going to jump off his Thunderdrum right there and smack me, but he just started nodding. "Why not?"

"Alvin will be looking for us. The first place he'll think to look is Berk. If I go there, at least, he'll definitely attack the island again, and I'd rather not have that happen. You guys go back to Berk, take care of Eret, and I'll stay on a different island for a little while. How's that?"

"No." Dad scowled at me. "Hiccup, you're coming back to Berk, where

it's safeâ€”

"No, I'm not," I replied. "Berk might be a safe place for me, but I'm not a safe person. Alvin's inevitably going to find me there, but there's a chance he'll leave the island alone if he sees I'm not on it." I had to admit, that was a pretty big if.

"Island," Eret grunted suddenly, his hand biting into my shoulder. "Myâ€—island. The Outcasts abandoned itâ€—you'd be safe there."

"Wait a sec," Gobber interrupted, "isn't this the island with the man-eating garden?"

"No." A sheen of sweat glistened on Eret's forehead; just talking, and forcing himself to stay conscious, was an effort. "Outcastsâ€—dismantled it."

"Alright, then you guys can take Eret to Berk and hunker down there while Alvin searches for meâ€—"

"No." Eret interrupted, "I'mâ€—Iâ€—I want to stay with you."

When I looked back at him in confusion, I saw that those hard golden eyes were much softer than I'd ever seen them before. He looked so vulnerable. He must not even be in his head due to blood loss.

"Umâ€—alright," I relented, "butâ€—but it might not be safe with meâ€—"

"We all want to stay with you," Astrid added, her Deadly Nadder dropping down into place beside me. "Safe or not."

"Iâ€—okay, no, I have to put my foot down on this, guys â€— it'll be dangerous, and Dad's got a whole island to lead. Don't forget, if they lay siege to an island with an absent chief, victory for the Outcasts is almost certain. The people depend on you, Dad, and you at least, need to go back to Berk. And the rest of you â€— it's not safe for you, so you guys should reallyâ€—"

"Why is Eret allowed to stay with you, and we aren't?" Tuffnut demanded, like it was a slumber party he hadn't gotten an invitation to.

"Hiccup _thinks_ we aren't allowed to stay with him," Astrid corrected, her eyes blazing as she talked. "Because apparently, he's under the impression that he can stop us."

"You aren't staying with me!" I told her, a little stung by the fact that she thought I couldn't stop her, but mostly frustrated with her complete disregard for her own safety, and my logic. "Go back, go on to Berk! It'll be dangerous when Alvin starts searching for me, but he might leave Berk alone. And like I said, they need Dad there."

"He's got a point," Gobber muttered.

Dad scowled. "Oh, no. Hiccup, if you aren't going back to Berk, neither am I."

"I'll only be gone long enough for Alvin to lose my scent. Nothing will happen while I'm gone."

"You were gone last time for almost three weeks!" Dad replied, his voice rising into the yelling zone. "I'm not risking you again!"

"I don't know if this has occurred to you, but I don't need your permission." My voice came out unlike me. I sounded mean. "Toothless can outfly a Thunderdrum any day of the week, I'm really good at losing people who try to track me, and you know I have a point, whatever you say. I'm not taking no for an answer! This way makes the most sense, and you know it."

Dad clenched his jaw. Again, I expected a blow before remembering we were in the air.

"How about this?" Astrid's quiet, surprisingly calm voice broke the tense silence between us. "Why don't you go back to Berk, Stoick, and Eret, Toothless and I will go with Hiccup, and look after him. You know I'm the best teenage fighter on Berk, and Toothless is a Night Fury. And Eret was doing pretty good in battle earlier, until that spear got him." She flicked his eyes down to his leg. The flow of blood had slowed to a mere trickle, but he appeared to be finally losing the battle against unconsciousness for good.

Dad opened his mouth to protest, but Astrid forestalled him. "It's like Hiccup said â€" he argues a fair point. You're the chief â€" your presence is needed more with your island right now."

I was honestly surprised that Astrid swung it for me like that, but at the same time, I also recognized her clever way of getting herself into my plans. I was caught between scowling at her in annoyance and smiling at her in gratitude.

Dad's shoulders visibly slumped where he clung to the Thunderdrum's cool blue scales, but he finally spoke. "Alright. We'll go back to Berk, and you three get to a safe place. I mean it, Hiccup."

I nodded at him, but I was unable to hold his gaze. The tension between us was still too thick, and I knew he'd understood my unspoken words. Without even saying it, I'd communicated to him that I wanted him to stop acting so much like the father I knew he was to me. And I knew that it had hurt him, and angered him.

"Yay!" Ruffnut cheered upon hearing the plan. "Can we go with Hiccup too, Chief? Can we?"

"No." Dad didn't even look at her when he spoke. "You're coming back to Berk, with us."

"Hmph." Ruffnut crossed her arms and frowned, but allowed the separation to occur.

Within moments, I was riding back to Eret's island, and they were riding steadily away from us, back into the fog.

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 35: Everything

**A/N: Well, here I am. With a new chapter. I just had the greatest, coolest idea for a new plot direction for this fic (because even though even freaking though I've basically plotted out a whole chunk of this fic, there's always room for more plot ideas) and this chapter is a direct link to that subplot which is still very important to the main plot. All these subplots are either important, or they just really seriously add to Hiccup's emotional turmoil. xD He has quite a bit of it, huh? Also, Eret's man-eating garden returns! How do you like it xD **

* * *

><p>It took us a long time to locate Eret's hideout.<p>

Astrid and I walked around the woods for an hour or more, while Eret mumbled senseless, fragmented and disjointed words from the Nadder's back, sounding more like a person with a head injury than a leg wound. I probably should have paid better attention whenever Eret led me back to the hideout, instead of constantly grumbling at him that he was going to get us lost.

"Maybe we should just make camp for the night," Astrid suggested softly, gesturing to the steadily lightening sky.

"Make camp for _the night_?" I raised an eyebrow. "The sun is rising, not setting. And anyway, I know where it is, I swear, we're just on the verge of itâ€¦" I stepped into a thicket of trees, motioning Astrid to follow me, but after a quick look around, I realized we were on the right track. Here was Eret's garden, completely dead. Everything that might have once been living and breathing had fled the clearing, and no birds sang anymore. There were just thick, choking, thorny vines wrapping themselves around tree trunks and bushes and blades of grass, trying to physically squeeze the life out of something already dead, trying to give themselves a little more time to live.

I edged a little farther into the clearing and turned to look at the five behind me, to see Astrid hesitating, looking down at the dead garden. When it was alive, it was a brutal thing, but when it was dead, it seemed so sad. I motioned for her to follow. "C'mon," I called to her, "c'mon, it's not dangerous anymore, the Outcasts dismantled it. Eret said so."

"Did it look like this before it was dismantled?" Astrid sounded hesitant, but she stepped onto the grass anyway, running so lightly her feet never seemed to touch the ground. She came to a stop beside me, her hand brushing mine, like she thought I was the only safety in the midst of the whole place.

I shook my head in response to her question. "No. This place, it wasâ€¦it was beautiful." Beautiful yet brutal. "It wasâ€¦there wasâ€¦there were flowers everywhere, and birds and dragons, and the

grass was really bright green and no one was afraid of anyone else." I trailed off to realize she was giving me a confused look, like she was maybe questioning my mental health. Either way, I dropped the subject, taking her hand and leading her on through the clearing, out into another wall of trees. The rising sun winked and flashed in between the branches as it threw itself ever higher into the sky, almost too bright to look at now. Eret moaned something from the dragon's back as he bolted across the clearing, trying his hardest not to upset the human on his back nor step on any thorny vines.

Toothless barely seemed to notice the vines; he slipped as easily as a shadow through that clearing, seeming to defy everything within it before emerging onto the other side. Astrid's Nadder quickly followed, and when I was satisfied that everyone had caught up to us, I resumed walking again, my eyes peeled for the perfect tree. I knew it had to be around here, a towering thing with leaves as big as my fist, and quite a bit thicker, and a trunk with a small crack for the door, and when you opened it wide enough, you could crawl inside and there would be a sort of makeshift home in there.

I surprised myself by almost missing that little place, because even though I'd felt completely alone, without Toothless or anyone I loved, with Outcasts swarming the island, I'd had Eret. And Eret had treated me like his responsibility, teasing me and telling me to get back in out of the cold, telling me to sleep, because the next day would be a long one, or comforting me when I missed Toothless, or I swallowed, stealing a glance at the wounded man. Or revealing to me a destiny that I wasn't sure was mine, and attempting to force it on me. I still missed the place, even though it was one of the many where my whole life changed.

I knew the tree instantly when I'd found it " it seemed bigger than I remembered, taller and more imposing, but I kept my eyes glued to the trunk, searching for the crack that I knew was there. When I at last found it and managed to pull it open, like a tiny door, Astrid gave a gasp.

I crawled inside without waiting for her, and I gasped, drawing instantly back at what I saw. The place had been ransacked, completely and totally. Books were scattered all over the floor, the blankets Eret had given me to make my bed were tattered and torn, even more so than they already had been. The fireplace was damp and cold, having gone such a long time without use, and the door to Eret's treasure room was thrown wide open, where the damage was most visible. The room had been picked clean. There was not a trace of gold anywhere in sight, and I felt sick to my stomach as I looked around at the room that I had actually started to miss. Its setup was still the same, but nothing was like I remembered it anymore.

"Astrid." I spoke her name quietly, surprising myself with what my voice sounded like. I cleared my throat and tried again. "Astrid. Do you have a knife?" I knelt down on the floor, slowly, carefully. I didn't want to disturb anything, but at the same time, I longed to put everything back in its proper place. I picked up several blankets, already folding them into a sort of makeshift bed. Astrid reached down, tugging a knife out of her boot and carefully handing it over to me. I picked up one of the blankets, gripped the knife, and proceeded to hack it into pieces with the blade. "Do you know

anything about treating leg wounds?"

"A little," she admitted, sinking down onto the floor beside me.
"What do you need me to do?"

"We need some water." I worked to keep my voice steady, even though it started to shake. "Do we have a bucket anywhere?" I looked around for any kind of container that we could transport water in, spying a jug leaning against the far wall. I raced over to it immediately, finding there was still a little water left in it. Wasting no time, I poured it slowly onto a thick scrap of the blanket I was holding, pressing it to Eret's leg and listening to him give a quiet hiss of pain. He shifted and stirred feebly as I poured the last of the water onto the cloth, pressing it once more to his leg.

"We'll need more," I told Astrid quietly, gesturing to the empty jug.
"One of us will have to stay and look after Eret and"

"I'll go," she volunteered, instantly on her feet. Something told me she was anxious to be out. "I'll get us some water." She grabbed the jug from my hands and, without waiting for a response, pushed open the door to the tree trunk house, and slipped outside, into the steadily brightening dawn.

I rubbed my eyes tiredly as I pressed the cloth down a little harder over Eret's leg, trying to clean the wound as gently as I could.

Eret groaned, trying to roll over onto his stomach, but I pushed him up again, talking to him in the most soothing way I knew how. "No, no, no, Eret, you can't do that, you have to stay on your back, otherwise I can't reach your leg"

"Leg" Eret mumbled, looking confused and disoriented. "My leg hurts."

"Yes," I explained patiently. "It was wounded."

I folded the cloth in half and pressed it to his leg again.

"Leg," Eret repeated softly. "You didn't go into the falls with your leg, did you?"

"No," I replied, startled. "No, of course not." It took a minute for the full meaning of his words to hit me. "Wait. What are you talking about? What falls?"

"Your leg," Eret mumbled, sinking deeper into his nest of blankets.
"Your metal leg would have set off the falls."

I glanced down at him in pure confusion. "What are you talking about?"

"Remove all weapons before entering the falls," Eret muttered.
"That's the only way to not set off the alarms."

Eret really did sound like somebody with a recent head injury. I ran my fingers through his thick brown hair, searching for a bump or bruise or welt, but he just pushed me away weakly, trying to scowl

and not getting very far. "Don't touch my head, Hiccup." For once, he seemed completely in the moment.

"Why, does it hurt?"

"It always hurts," he responded slowly, his voice slurring again as he closed his eyes. "Everything always hurtsâ€¦" His voice trailed off as he turned his head away from me.

"Eret, Eret, wait, don't go to sleep, this is no time for sleepingâ€"Eret!" For some reason, I was terrified that if he closed his eyes now, he would never open them again. "Eret!" I shook his shoulder frantically, and his eyes blinked open after a long, breathless minute.

"I'm here, Hiccup." His voice was so quiet. "I'm here now. It's okay."

Oh, gods, he was the wounded one, the one barely in his head, and he was trying to reassure me. If that didn't make me the worst caretaker in the world, I don't know what did.

The door to the tree trunk house creaked open and Astrid slipped inside, carrying a jug of water. Eret lifted his eyes to her, slowly, so slowly. He closed his eyes again, beginning to lose himself to sleep, but I just poured the water onto the cloth and pressed it to his leg again.

He sat bolt upright this time, attempting to push me off now. "That hurts!"

"It'll feel better in a minute," I promised desperately, but all the same, I took the rag off minutes before I intended to, and started tying the scraps of blanket together, except the one I'd wet with water. Eret's eyelids fluttered again as I slowly wrapped his leg in the bits of old blanket.

This time, he fell asleep for real. I had to keep glancing at his chest to make sure he was still alive.

36. Hurt

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 36: Hurt

****A/N:** Well, I know it took awhile for me to get this chapter up. And that it's just full of Hiccup angst xD I'm sorry about that. I guess I'm just in the mood for sad stuff. And yeah, yeah, yeah, I know what you're thinking: "You're always in the mood for sad stuff!" Just shoosh, okay? I actually do have a new idea for a new chapter of Untold and it's sort of fluffy. Kind of. Okay, not really, but if it's written the way I want it to, it will at least give people happy feels. ******

Oh, oh, also, I became a beta reader. I've helped people out with their stories and stuff before, but I've never been an "official" beta reader. Now I am. So basically, I'm open and ready for requests, but I'm also slightly scared. I shouldn't have really done it, because of all the stories on my plate, but meh. Spring break is coming up. I've got time. *flounces around pretending I actually do have time when I really, probably don't* But I am going to be pretty busy this summer, hopefully, so I might not be as active then. I'll probably still write a ton, though, because nothing can stop me from writing for long. Not even my love of the procrastinated word xD Yeah, see, get it because "love of the written word" but obviously mine wouldn't be written if I'd...yeah, I'm just gonna stop right now. I'll see myself out.

* * *

><p>It was a rather quiet day in the tree trunk hideout – peaceful, almost. After I washed Eret's leg, using three quarters of the water Astrid had collected, I sat there for a long time, just watching him breathe. Mostly, I was just glad he was okay, that Astrid and Toothless and Stormfly were okay, that we had all made it out okay.<p>

"We should get that arrow out, Hiccup." Astrid's voice was gentle as she knelt down next to me, her blue eyes speaking the concern her voice could not.

My own voice was difficult to use, after the silence that had pervaded the tree trunk hideout for so long. "I guess so."

"I'm scared it's going to get infected," she continued, as if she thought I needed an explanation. "I just don't want that to happen, because if it does, we'll have twice as many things to deal with. And Alvin would love it if you were too weak to fight back, Hiccup."

I already was too weak to fight back, I thought to myself. Sure, we had all gotten out safely this time around, but if I could only stop running from him one day and start fighting him, maybe things might change. I couldn't fight Alvin, I was too weak. I ran every time he got too close to me. It was what I had done my whole life. Just one long race, one long marathon, except there was no clear finish line because there would never be a time when Alvin would quit hunting me, never be a time when I could relax, where I could settle down, have a chance at happiness and a better life.

I closed my eyes, but instantly reopened them again at Astrid's next words. "Take off your tunic."

"Wh-what?"

"Take it off, Hiccup," she responded, taking the knife from me without waiting for me to give it, and brandishing it rather threateningly. "I need to get it off to get the arrow out, remember? Or if it's too hard one-handed, I can take it off."

"No." I was quick to reassure her. "No, I got it." I didn't like the idea of her looking at my bare skin, seeing my scars, and liked the idea of her helping me get my tunic off even less.

It took a lot of twisting and tugging, but I finally managed to

unlace the shirt and pull it as gently as I could off my body, letting it fall to the floor. I didn't want her to see my scars, but I knew she would just continue to argue, and I didn't want that. I felt her hesitating, and could sense the sharp silver blade hovering just above my skin.

"Astrid." My voice came out sounding sharper than the knife in her hand. "If you're going to do it, just do it."

"Right. Sorry. It's justâ€¦" she took a deep breath. She swallowed. She was too nice, too polite to say she was freaked out by my scars, too worried for her reputation to say that the thin white lines, the whip scars all over my back scared her.

I almost flinched at the unspoken words in her sentence, and then cried out in pained surprise as I felt her beginning to make the first incision.

"Sorry, does that hurt?"

"Well, I made a noise," I responded. "What do you think?"

She gave a quiet intake of breath, and I shifted slightly, trying to straighten my shoulders, even though it hurt. "It's okay. Just keep going."

There were a few minutes of complete silence, but though she worked quietly, she worked efficiently. The pain let me know that she was doing quite well, and when it stopped, there was only a beat beforeâ€¦ "Okay," she announced, taking her hands away from my shoulder. "Okay. It's out."

I twisted around to look at her, to see her still holding the bloody-tipped arrow, her fingers stained red.

"Hiccup, I'd say you have a god or a Valkyrie watching out for you from Valhalla," she said quietly, twirling the arrow around in her fingers. She didn't seem to care about the blood dripping freely from the silver head.

"What? Why?"

"That arrowâ€¦ it hit maybe two inches deep, nothing more. The head was the only thing keeping it still embedded. Hiccup, you've got a god watching out for you, mark my words."

* * *

><p>I was glad when Astrid finally collapsed in a nest of blankets at about five o' clock in the afternoon, because now this meant she couldn't fuss over me. After bandaging my shoulder, she'd taken the water from the jug and cleaned the blood off the back of my hand from where the knife had grazed me, inspected the area and informed me that, as the injury was not deep, it didn't look like the knife had hit anything major, and slapped a bandage on that, too. It was like she thought I didn't know how to go on with untreated wounds. I'd done it before, I could do it again. The people of Berk were weird sometimes.<p>

The days were lengthening, too, as summer was coming, so even though

it was five o' clock, the sun still hadn't set, but the sky was definitely not as pale as it had been that morning. I sprawled out on the floor of the tree trunk hideout against Toothless, listening to him breathe and knowing that, with every breath, he was thinking of the people around us, and thanking every one of our gods that they had gotten out safe and alive. I rested my head against his back, knowing that the sharp edge of his saddle would keep me awake and alert enough to notice if anybody else tried to enter the hideout. I knew Astrid would probably be mad at me for letting her sleep, but she needed the rest. I could see it in every tired, overworked line of her pretty, fine-boned face, and so I let her sleep, listening to her breathe evenly, in and out, in and out, just like Eret. Hearing the breath of both was a comfort to me.

For some reason, my dad jumped to the forefront of my mind â€" my real dad, who I had sped away from hours earlier, after getting into yet another argument with him. We seemed to have a lot of those and for a moment, I wondered if the relationship I couldn't remember was even worth saving, even worth remembering. Was I always fighting him, even back then? And then there was that wordâ€"traitor. It filled me with dread, made me shudder, and made me think of him, my father, staring down at me with a hard coldness to his gray eyes and there was nothing in his gaze. Andâ€"andâ€"andâ€" I couldn't remember anything else. He held a sword in one hand, that I knew, that I remembered. And the sword looked kind of familiar to me, as if I had had something to do with its presence in his fist. But I just couldn't remember. It was so frustrating that I wanted to scream.

My head was pounding from such a strong, scary memory. The back of my hand was stinging beneath the bandage. My heart was breaking because of everything that had happened, because of my inability to be strong, to be brave for the people who needed me. The inability to be the King they needed. My shoulder was throbbing from where Astrid had drawn out the arrow.

I thought maybe I understood what Eret meant when he said everything always hurt.

37. Sanity

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 37: Sanity

**A/N: Hi :D Well, I am back, with a new chapter. This one is...sad, I guess? At the end more than anything. It's just kind of a gentle, angsty transition from one plot point to the next, so there may not be a whole lot of action for the next couple chapters or so? Like things will be happening that are important to the plot but nothing big happens until chapter...I dunno. 39, maybe? That seems too soon. Meh, I'll figure it out later. I do not own the idea of Wanderers, or Wanderers' language, just the words used in place of English words.

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* * *

><p>I was right. Astrid was mad at me for letting her sleep. The first thing she did was grab my collar to hold me still, I presumed, and punch me on the uninjured shoulder.<p>

"How long was I asleep?" she asked casually, and as if nothing had happened, releasing me and plopping down cross-legged on the floor beside me.

I scowled at her, rubbing at the offending area, which was probably going to bruise. "I don't know. A couple hours? Five, maybe." I myself stifled a huge yawn when I spoke, stretching a little as I finally moved from my rather stiff position against Toothless' back. Even though I had been mostly inactive today, I was exhausted. The last few days, coupled with the lack of sleep of two nights and two days running, was taking its toll.

"You should get some rest now." Astrid's voice was instantly gentle again. I didn't even know Vikings knew how to be gentle, especially not a Viking like her. I also wanted to argue with her about the idea of getting rest, but my body betrayed me by forcing another yawn through my lips and after it was over, I mumbled, "Yeah, okay."

"Go on, Hiccup, go lay down."

"Right." I rubbed at my eyes. "C'mon, Toothless, buddy, let's go. Let's get some sleep." I collapsed into the nest of blankets gratefully, allowing my eyes to drift closed of their own accord. The quilt was still warm from Astrid's body.

She was still above me, and I thought maybe her fingers were in my hair, playing with it, teasing it. I enjoyed her calming touch immensely, even though I ordinarily hated people touching my head. I was almost asleep when I blurted suddenly, without thinking, "You're a good person."

She laughed, sounding a little surprised. "I think the lack of sleep is making you delirious, Hiccup. Just close your eyes."

"No, I mean it," I mumbled, barely aware of what I was saying anymore. "You took the arrow outâ€|without staring at my scarsâ€|making fun of me for themâ€|telling me I was ugly from themâ€|"

Her hand on my head never quit moving, but she spoke slowly, like she was still trying to process everything I was saying. "But you're not ugly, Hiccup."

It seemed a silly thing to argue about, ugliness, so I decided to let her keep her delusions. Another yawn came out of my mouth before I rolled over and fell asleep. Something lightly tickled my forehead just before I fell asleep for real, and then that calming stroking of my hair stopped. Astrid was gone.

* * *

><p>Of course I had a dream. Dad and Gobber were riding atop the blue Thunderdrum. Gobber looked tired and bewildered, but Dad looked positively murderous. It was scary.<p>

"I'm going to kill them," he muttered between clenched teeth. "I don't care what their excuse is this time, I'm really going to kill them."

"Stoick," Gobber cut in timidly, "I'm sure they just went to join Hiccup!"

Dad exploded. "Don't even get me started on him! Escapes from the hands of a bloodthirsty madman, shaking and injured, immediately plunging off to Thor-knows-where with a teenage girl and a wounded madman!"

"And a Night Fury," Gobber added brightly.

Dad gave his friend a long look.

Perhaps the blacksmith replayed his own words in his head, and realized something off about them, because he hastened to explain. "No, I didn't mean! Toothless is really good at defending him! I only meant! sorry."

The Thunderdrum sped ever forward, following a course I couldn't see.

* * *

><p>"Hiccup!"<p>

It was Astrid's voice that startled me into wakefulness, her sudden hand on my shoulder, shaking me in the darkness.

"Ow! Astrid!" I tried to push her away as gently as I could. "What? What is it?"

"It's Eret," she explained breathlessly. "I'm! I don't know what's wrong with him, Hiccup! he's acting really odd!"

"What do you mean?" I was instantly up again, blinking in the darkness as my eyes steadily adjusted, making out a dark shape on the blankets next to me, moving restlessly, eyelids flickering every few seconds.

"_Essiue! Essiue!" _he called out, very clearly, his voice piercing the stillness and the darkness. "_En acark enn essen, Essiue."

—

"See, I tried to kind of wake him to get a straight answer out of him, but it's all like this, it's all gibberish."

"Astrid, shush." I tilted my head to hear Eret better, figuring my odds were better of decoding his words that way.

"_En sennsenn ee hikling, Essiue." _Eret's face was red and drenched in sweat as he shifted again, his hands fisted around his blankets like they were the last thing tying him to the earth. When he next spoke, his voice sounded very small. "_En's son En finned yos." _

"I don't think it's gibberish," I said slowly, looking down into Eret's pinched face, his trembling lips, his cheeks wet with freshly shed tears.

"What, you think he's somehow making sense?"

"In a way." When she continued to look confused, I elaborated. "Look, Eret's notâ€|really a Viking. He's a Wanderer, and I've heard Wanderers speak before â€" they don't speak our language. They don't speak Norse."

"You mean, they have a different one?"

I nodded. "I never understood anything they meant when they spoke in it, but Alvin used to have Wanderer slaves, and they always spoke in what sounded like gibberish. Gust explained their language to me."

I dropped my gaze back to Eret, studying every line in his face, around in his eyes, lines where he had not smiled. My heart hurt for him. If I could, I would help heal his suffering. I remembered what he'd told me, showing me his whip scars so I wouldn't feel bad, telling me how his people were still in slavery, how he'd tried to free them once and failedâ€|if I could, I would free them. I would do everything in my power to keep them safe, and make it so nobody could ever be enslaved again. That's what I would do, if I could.

I swept Eret's brown hair back out of his face, looking at his flickering eyelids, hoping for him to wake up. For a second, when he switched abruptly back to speaking fluent Norse, I thought he had.

"I marked it, Hiccup." I jumped at the use of my name, checking to make sure his eyes were still closed. "I marked it with my name. Look in the dirtâ€|where I marked my nameâ€|"

Even when he was speaking in Norse, it was like he wasn't. I could barely understand him at the best of times, with his talk about my leg and the falls. What had the Outcasts done to him, to mess him up this badly?

Astrid and I exchanged glances in the darkness, and I knew we were both thinking the same thing.

"I wish he would just make sense," I muttered to myself, slumping back against the blankets, running a hand over my face tiredly. But I wished for so much more than that. A part of me wished I could go back in time, stop this from ever happening, stop myself from crashing onto Eret's island and dragging him into this whole mess. I'd done this to him, brought all of this on us. If I could, I would go back in time and undo it all, because he was a good person, a loyal friend, and he did not deserve this. If I could, I would protect him from all of this in an instant â€" even if it meant my life.

He'd seemed perfectly sensible when I'd last seen him in my dreams, even when I'd been searching for the Throne on the beach. He'd talked and made sarcastic comments like it was any other day. What could Alvin possibly have done to him, between then and now, that could have driven him toâ€|to this? This point?

I put my hand over his, and the size difference was immediately noticeable. He was bigger than me, older, but I was responsible for him. He was my responsibility. I'd dragged him into this, just like

I'd dragged everyone into this. Eret and Astrid and Stormfly and the Nadder that Eret had never named, the Nadderâ€|the Nadder that Eret might not live to name. Was it better to die with your sanity, or live with it split?

I'd dragged them into this mess, driven Eret crazy. I'd killed Snotlout and Humongous, and I owed so many people so many things, so much compensation for what they'd gone through for me. I was suddenly afraid and alone. I think I would have cried, but Astrid's hand on my shoulder was so comforting. She was the only thing in this world I had right then, so I turned my face away from the mess I had made of a proud and sane man. I hid my face from him and buried it instead in her shoulder, feeling tears building up in my eyes. I would never be able to give Eret back everything he'd lost. I could never give anybody back anything. I could not bring Snotlout back from the grave, no matter how loudly I yelled. And no matter how much I bled for him, I could not bleed life back into Humongous. I could not give Eret back his sanity. I could not repair the things I had broken, not when I myself was too broken to do anything but simply be, right then. I simply was there, not crying or tearing up anymore, not sobbing or speaking, simply holding on, simply being.

Toothless sensed my feelings, because he was suddenly there too, and this wasn't right, Toothless and Astrid comforting me when it was Eret who'd lost everything, Eret and Snotlout and Humongous and Astrid and Toothless, people who had lost everything in a useless quest to give me life. For the first time in a long time, Astrid didn't ask me what to do about Eret. She leaned over and gently shook his shoulder, rousing him from sleep.

He was still speaking in different languages when he woke, and when he switched to Norse, he made no sense. I had done this to him. To everyone.

38. Surprises

Unbreakable

_The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'. _

Chapter 38: Surprises

**A/N: This feeelsssss like a dumb chapter title. Is it? Well, it's 3,000 words. That ought to count for something? (I feel all you six-kers judging me silently like ohhh you amateur, but shush, okay? D:) Anywayyyy, this is the new chapter, and it's too long to really do anything with, but at the same time, there's no good point for me to split it in half. I hope you like anyway! Please review?
:3**

Also, this chapter should be called "Some Hiccstrid" xD xD xD I didn't even mean to put Hiccstrid in here, but for some reason, it feels like they're in here now? Hiccstrid is probably gonna be in this now. Just a warning.

* * *

><p>The night was a sleepless one. I couldn't sleep, couldn't even close my eyes. Toothless stayed awake with me all night, moaning and crooning softly in my ears, trying to comfort me. He knew what I was feeling, sensed my guilt, and he was trying to comfort me? He should have been trying to soothe Eret, the real victim in all of this.<p>

Every time the man closed his eyes, I shook his shoulder and shouted things in my sleepless delirium until he finally opened them again. I couldn't let him sleep. I was scared I would lose him to more senseless mutterings. Astrid stayed by my side too, but she continually dozed off, waking only when I yelled for Eret, pleading with him not to go away from me. She slept with her cheek on her hand, eyelids fluttering, pretty lips parting into a small yawn every time I unintentionally roused her.

"Hiccup." She finally put a hand on my shoulder, her fingers clenching tight. I winced when they found the thick bandage she had placed there. "Let him sleep, Hiccup, he's exhausted. Just let him sleep."

I drew in a deep breath, struggling to form words, to explain my fear to her. I meant to sound better than this, but my strength deserted me. "I'm scared," I whispered, scooting a little closer to her, allowing her to tangle her fingers in my hair again. I was beginning to feel shaky and too cold, my head spinning from some sort of indefinable illness. "I'm scared, Astrid, I don't wantâ€¦I don't want this."

She offered me a small, sad smile. Her features looked tired and worn again. I was waking her every time I woke Eret, and I realized how exhausted she must be. "Nobody wanted this, Hiccup."

Her words made me remember mine, made me look for a deeper meaning. When I'd said it, I'd initially meant that I didn't want Eret to fall asleep again, but she must have heard a deeper truth to my words. I didn't want this, never did. I didn't ask to be involved in this bloody war. It was my fault she was even sitting there beside me, trying to comfort me when she was so clearly exhausted herself. I swallowed, falling suddenly limp against her body, and I felt her wrap a thin arm around me, my waist, pulling me closer to her, as if she thought she could protect me from all that was wrong with the world. That wasn't right. I should be protecting her.

But despite the fact that I should have been the one protecting her, despite the fact that this was Astrid and Astrid was just not the type to hug and comfort people, it felt right. I didn't fight her. I was too tired for fights, and too tired for sleep. I just wanted sunlight in the eternal night of this dark, scary world.

"I'm sorry," she whispered finally, and I pulled away from her one-armed embrace curiously to look at her. I had dragged her into everything, and she was apologizing to me? What had she done?

"I'm sorry, youâ€¦" she drew in a deep breath, her voice sounding shaky when she spoke again. "I'm sorry that this has happened."

"It's not your fault," I told her, pressing my head against hers, because I longed to be close to her, to feel the gentle touch of a

person who did not have the wish to hurt me. I should have drawn comfort from Toothless, and I did, but I was suddenly terribly lonely for human friends.

"It'll be okay." She sounded more distant now, like she was beginning to fall asleep, or maybe I was falling asleep on her. "It'll be okay, Hiccup. You'll be okay. We'll be okay, you and me."

I nodded against her, but I was so tired that I could not lift my face to hers, not even to speak. I wanted to shake myself, force myself back into wakefulness because I did not deserve to leave the pain behind. Eret was not getting the privilege of leaving the pain behind. He had to deal with it even in sleep, if his crazy mumbling was anything to go by.

I could feel myself slipping away, slipping into sleep. It must have been very late. Very late, for the sky was so very dark, and Astrid was very warm and comforting, and I loved her fingers in my hair, because right then, all I needed was reassurance that things were going to be okay. And I shouldn't have needed it, because I should have been reassuring her, protecting her, but I could not bring myself to open my eyes and do it. It was very warm there in the tree trunk hideout, and I felt almost comforted, because somehow, I believed Astrid's words now, I believed that we were going to be okay. I slipped into sleep.

* * *

><p>Toothless was trying to wake me. He was being rather annoying about it, licking at my face and nuzzling at my neck persistently, probably trying to persuade me to go flying or something like that. I was so tired I didn't even think of how impossible that would be. I just shoved against him with my hands, muttering sleepily, "C'mon, Toothless, let me sleep. It's too dark. We'll play later."<p>

"Hiccup?" The voice was slurred from sleep, still sounding a little tired, but I recognized it. My eyes snapped open, my heart almost hurting with the physical hope of it, and I looked up and around. The sky was still dark, and there was a warm, loose arm wrapped around me. I gently pushed it away, scrambling over to Eret on my knees, because there he was with his brown eyes wide, looking completely alert. Speaking directly to me, not random things that made no sense, or in a different language, but my name, in Norse. My hope was so huge it was almost impossible to contain it.

"Yes?" My own voice was so quiet, compared to the feeling in my chest. "What is it, Eret?"

"People." he murmured sleepily, already beginning to slump against me. "People outside."

My hope started falling as quickly as it had risen. No, he must still be talking nonsense, especially considering how unwell he seemed. Leaning slightly to the side, already beginning to sway, clutching at me to stay upright. I placed my small hand over his large one, trying to smile for him.

"There are people." He opened his brown eyes as wide as they could go, pushing against me and my touch. "There are people _outside_."

I started to begin reassuring him, but I stopped suddenly when I heard the noises: thumping footsteps, loud yells, names I couldn't quite hear being holleredâ€|Eret was speaking the truth. My heart jumped into my throat, and my first thought was of Outcasts. They must have found us, but how? My brain spun crazily around that one question, demanding the truth.

Toothless was nodding along to Eret's words, looking supremely pleased.

I sped over to Astrid, shaking her shoulder, halfway to waking her before I realized something, my panicked brain catching up with my common sense. Wait a second. If those were Outcasts pounding around the forest and calling like that while they were supposed to be searching for me, Alvin would most certainly have killed them by now. The Outcasts often tried to practice stealth to get me back, but thisâ€|was not stealth. Why would they give away their position unless they absolutely had to?

I paused, listening closer to the noises now, focusing more on the voices, the dream I had had of Dad and Gobber speeding readily to the forefront of my mind. I dashed over to the tree trunk hideout's door, looking out at the dark forest, the wind whispering through the trees like a hundred sad ghosts. I thought I knew who was out there, and I thought I knew, just maybe, who they were calling. I slipped out onto the grass and Astrid was instantly before me, hands on her hips, barring my way. Toothless flew out beside us.

"Hiccup, you need to get on Toothless and get Eret and get away from here as fast as you can!"

"Astrid," I placed a hand on her waist to still her, to catch her attention. In the darkness, I could see a pink flush crawling up her cheeks from the touch. "Don't those voices sound familiar to you?"

"Hiccup, I don't have timeâ€|"

"Astrid, just close your eyes and listen. Don't they sound familiar?"

She glared at me for a second, long and hard. But to my surprise, she closed her eyes, tilting her head back a little. I did the same, listening as hard as I could, wondering what sound she would hear first. The wind blowing the leaves of the trees around us, or the crickets chirping in the wet grass we stood on?

She opened her eyes, shock spelled out clearly in her blue gaze. "But that'sâ€|!"

I nodded. "Exactly, c'mon. We can't let them blunder around and get captured by Outcasts, can we? That's my job."

She placed her hands on my hips, removing my fingers from her waist. "That's not funny."

"Alright, alright, as you wish. C'mon." We walked side-by-side in the dark forest path, hesitant to call out for them and risk revealing our position to potential predators.

"This isn't right," Astrid said slowly. "That accent sounded Berkian, but what Hooligan would be stupid enough toâ€"

It was then that Tuffnut came flying out of the brush, blond hair swinging around him as he hopped on one foot, clutching the other in apparent pain. "Ow! Ow! Ooh, ow! They're not in the briar patch!"

"Tuffnut!" I cried in bewilderment. I had sort of expected to see him ever since my dream that was only just now making sense, but I guess I hadn't expected to find him like this. "What are youâ€|what are you doing here?" I was fairly certain that my dream had answered that question as well, but I asked it anyway, in the faint hope that he might give me a different answer.

He released his foot in surprise, backing up a couple steps before realizing it was me and looking at me as if I was stupid. "Looking for you, of course."

"Why?" I sounded startled, and I was; why would he come looking for me when he and Ruffnut had made it safely out of danger with Stoick and Gobber?

But instead of answering my question, he tossed his head back and howled up at the heavens above, "IDIOT! HEY, IDIOT! I FOUND THEM!"

Astrid started punching him. "Do you even know how to be quiet?" she hissed between blows. Even when being punched, he was screaming 'ow' with every hit. "You just let the whole forest know where we are!"

"Wait â€" the whole forest?" Tuffnut's blue eyes widened, and he sat up suddenly, pushing Astrid's flying fists away. "You mean, like the trees and stuff, too?"

I groaned. "No, Tuffnut, it's just â€"

"Cool! HEY, IDIOT, THE WHOLE FOREST KNOWS WHERE WE ARE! DID YOU HEAR THAT? THE WHOLE FOREST KNOWS WHERE WEâ€"

Astrid mercifully ended the sentence by clamping her hand tightly over his mouth, saying venomously, "If you try to scream like that again, I'm throwing you into the ocean myself, for the Darkbreathers and Outcasts."

Tuffnut gave a muffled sound of understanding, and she slowly released him.

Ruffnut came running over, too, covered in dirt and with a few twigs tangled in her hair. She came to a stop in front of us, panting, hands on her knees, trying to catch her breath. When she finally managed, she cracked a small grin. "The whole forest?"

"No," I tried to forestall it again, but before I could do anything, they had come at each other, spit on their hands, and high-fived.

"So, you haven't answered the question." Astrid crossed her arms and

cocked her hip, her skirt flaring around her long legs. "What are you doing out here?"

"Looking for you," they answered in unison.

"Why are you looking for me?" I demanded, coming to stand in front of them. "Why did you leave Dad and Gobber?"

Tuffnut wrinkled his nose. "Because we wanted to be with you. So we decided to just come on our own."

I sighed, rubbing my forehead tiredly as I spoke. "So you came out here on a whim? How did you find us, for Thor's sake?"

"Well, we decided to try and follow you as best we could," Ruffnut explained. "But we didn't know exactly where the island was. So we had to retrace our steps and we did a lot of backpedaling â€" the chief nearly caught us once, we had to hide."

"You should have let him take you!" Astrid looked furious, her face turning red. "Rather than thump around outside the hideout, drawing all sorts of unwanted attention, scaring us half to deathâ€"!"

"Save it," Tuffnut held up a hand to shut her up, and she looked so outraged at this that I felt I had to intervene.

"Alright, guys, let's not startâ€¦getting angry about things until we've settled everything, alright? I guess you're here now, and there's nothing we can do about it, so you might as well come on into the hideout for now."

"For now?" Tuffnut looked appalled. "What do you mean, for now?"

"I mean it," I said calmly. "Dad's looking for you, I'll have to send you guys back. I have to let him know you guys are here, at least."

This started up a chorus of protests, like they were petulant children.

"Butâ€"butâ€¦but Hiccup!" Tuffnut whined, like it was the end of the world.

"But nothing. We're going to have to send you back. Meanwhile, c'mon inside. We've got water and blankets." For the first time since we escaped from Alvin, I started thinking about food, and my stomach grumbled. I hadn't eaten for a few days. No wonder I felt so low on energyâ€¦

Remembering the hideout, I turned to Astrid suddenly. "Eret," I gasped.

She furrowed her brow. "What's wrong with him, Hiccup? He seemed just the same all through last nightâ€"

"No, we left him all on his own at the hideout! If somebody attacked, he could be in real trouble, with his leg wounded the way it is! C'mon, we'd better get back!"

I tore through the forest as fast as I could, pushing aside branches

and brush with my elbow, stumbling through mud and grass the whole way back. We had gone deep into the forest in our search for Ruffnut and Tuffnut, and only now did I realize how far it had taken us. Why had we not thought of this before? I wondered frantically to myself, emerging at last out of the darkest part of the forest to see the huge tree standing before me. The sight of it had never been so relieving. I could feel my shoulders relaxing, but I knew enough to know to feel guilty. The last time I had left Eret, deserted him in this hideout, the Outcasts had gotten to him. If something similar had happened this time, and he hadn't even been lucid enough to screamâ€|it'd be all my fault.

The rising sun illuminated the branches of the tree as I stepped carefully toward it, pressing a hand to the trunk, searching for the entrance.

"Cool!" Tuffnut's eyes lit up. "You guys live in a_ tree_?"

"Umâ€|" I found the crack and pulled it open, the darkness engulfing us. We should start a fire, I thought to myself, crawling into the hideout and pulling the door closed again after the others had entered.

Eret was asleep again, passed out, but the sight of him lying there was so welcome. Nothing bad had happened to him. I half-ran, half-slipped over to him, tripping over my own prosthetic, looking down at him, leaning down to check, to see the breath leaving and going inside his body.

He was alright. I slumped over in relief, dragging in a few deep breaths as the twins looked around the hideout.

39. Fleeing the Hideout

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 39: Fleeing the Hideout

A/N: Well, that was a much-needed return to action, don't you agree? Anyway, here is chapter 39, with a slightly crappy but nonetheless existing ending, which is more than it had twenty-four hours ago. I had a pretty horrible Monday, and today has been a little better, but not by much. Seriously Monday was so terrible it was surreal. Normally that much crap happens to me in the course of a couple weeks, so to have all the bad stuff hit me in one day was pretty overwhelming. Aaand I'm tired. I want a donut.

* * *

><p>I looked around the hideout for a second or two, realizing suddenly that the place was shrouded in darkness, and the twins could hardly see it. Had it been this dark yesterday, when Astrid and I had entered the place? My eyes had adjusted to the gloom so quickly that I'd barely noticed it, and the layout of the place was fairly easy to remember. I turned to my dragon. "Toothless? Could you give us some

light, bud?"<p>

He complied, shooting one of his trademark plasma blasts at the hearth, bathing the room in warm golden light, chasing away the darkness immediately. Now would the twins see how wrong they had been to come here? Would they finally see that this was real danger, running and hiding and constantly being afraid. We weren't playing at danger â€" we didn't have to.

Astrid picked up the empty water jug from the corner and unscrewed the cap, looking down into the vacant depths before bumping my shoulder with hers, and startling me out of my reverie. "I'm going out hunting in a few."

"What?" I turned to look at her. "Astrid, you can't!"

"Why not?" She looked truly mystified as she grabbed the metal poker from where it rested beside the hearth, prodding carefully at the crackling flames with it.

"It'sâ€¦it's too dangerous."

She dropped the poker beside the hearth, drawing a loud clang from the metal instrument, but she hardly seemed to care â€" folding her arms resolutely across her chest, she raised an eyebrow. "Oh. Dangerous, is it? Good thing I've got an axe, then." She drew the weapon off the floor, holding it easily in her hand.

"Astridâ€"

"No. This isn't up for discussion."

"At least take someone withâ€"

"Oh, I'm sorry." Her voice dripped with sarcasm. "Let me review my options: two wounded men, four dragons, or a pair of twins so loud they'd scare off all the game." She uncrossed her arms, as if this made her whole point. "I think I'll go it alone."

"Astridâ€"

The girl didn't wait for me to finish whatever I had been about to say; she poked me in the chest with her finger, hard, as she shook out her blond braid. "Whether you like it or not, tough guy, you're hurt, too. And your leg isn't exactly a silent tread. You're smart enough to be quiet, but that's not good enough. And nothing you say is going to change my mind." The way she spoke let me know the argument was closed.

It wouldn't matter even if I wanted to argue back; a voice interrupted me before I could. Ruffnut sounded high and breathy and not at all like her usual gruff grunts when she talked. "Who is that?"

"Huh?" I glanced around the room, awash in golden firelight making dancing shadows on the walls. Eret was the only person she could possibly be referring to, lying there on the blankets as he was. I felt suddenly like stepping in front of him, hiding him from view of her probing gray eyes. She shouldn't see him like this. Nobody should

see him like this.

They should see him proud and strong and well, holding a knife, raising an eyebrow, giving me a cocky smirk as he made a sarcastic comment. They shouldn't see him like this, sick and weak and not proud at all, pale and shaking, whole body trembling from his nightmares and fear.

"That's Eret," I told her quietly, only he deserved a better introduction than that, so I added, "He's usually different from this, usually better. He's usuallyâ€|he'sâ€"

"Perfect," Ruffnut interrupted, voice still completely unlike her. "He's absolutely perfect."

"Ruffnut, he's not right," I tried to explain, because she couldn't think like that about him. She couldn't make a judgment so soon, based on his looks. If she thought he was perfect now, she wouldn't think that when he woke her up screaming or talking in different languages, or speaking gibberish in ours. She wouldn't think he was perfect then.

"Perfect," she repeated dreamily, tracing her finger lightly over his face.

I sighed, turning away from her. If she didn't learn now, she was going to learn a bitter lesson the hard way.

Astrid, meanwhile, had strapped her axe into the holster at her waist, grabbed up the water jug, and taken the crossbow leaning against the wall, adding the quiver of arrows and testing the bowstring a few times to feel the give. "It'll do," she decided after the bow had undergone a long moment of examination. "I'll be back in a few hours. Watch yourselves. Hiccup." She added my name at the end of the sentence, as if she thought I was the one who didn't watch myself, when it was the twins who had zero sense of self-preservation. I rolled my eyes at her parting words.

"I still don't like you hunting alone."

"I'm still going," she told me, slipping out the door. Just before it shut behind her, she leaned back in the hideout and added, "If it'll make you feel more at ease, you can come looking for me if I'm not back by midday."

"Wow, I'm flattered you trust me with such an important mission," I grumbled to myself as she swept out the door, a breeze stirring some of the blankets and papers in the room as the door closed behind her.

"Was that Astrid?" A voice distracted me from my bitter muttering, and I turned quickly to see that Eret had apparently woken sometime during our conversation, and was sitting up on the blankets, looking pale and shaky but smiling a little all the same.

I sank to my knees immediately beside his makeshift bed, grabbing for his wrist just to hold some part of him. "Yeah. She's going to get food and refill our water jug." It was meaningless conversation, just idle chatter, really, but I was so grateful to have even this. Eret was here and in the moment, and not talking like somebody with a

recent head injury anymore.

"How's your leg feel?" I moved to peel away the bandages anxiously, but he frowned at me in confusion.

"Kind of painful. Why? Was it hurt?"

"Kind of," I told him. "Some Outcast ran you through with a spear, so yeah, I'm not surprised it feels painful."

"Oh." He looked surprised, sinking back down against the blankets. He stared vacantly at the ceiling for a minute, a confused frown on his face, but abruptly he returned to our former conversation and looked at me. "How's your leg?"

"Mine?" I repeated, glancing down at the prosthetic in not a bit of surprise. "Um. It's fine. Why?"

"I thought it was hurting." His brow knitted as he talked, betraying his uncertainty. "Was it?"

"_You didn't go into the falls with your leg, did you?" _

"No," I replied, releasing a small sigh. "No, it wasn't."

* * *

><p>Eret was awake for much of the early morning, but as afternoon rolled around, I guess the injuries and exhaustion took their toll, because he was asleep again pretty soon, odd and disjointed words falling occasionally from his mouth. But it was nothing to what it had been last night.<p>

Tuffnut quickly followed Eret's lead, and soon the hideout was filled with the sounds of deep, heavy breathing. It was a peaceful scene, or it should have been, but I kept thinking about Astrid. Was she okay? Why hadn't she come back yet? It was mid-afternoon. She should have been back by now.

I started pacing the floor restlessly, unable to stop myself from glancing at the sky every couple seconds, but I guess Ruffnut had had enough, because she stood up and grabbed my shoulders. "Hiccup. Sit down. She'll be back before loâ€"

"Shh!" I suddenly pushed her away, cocking my head. Was that screaming I heard, and muffled but definitely pained grunting? Was that metal, like swords clashing repeatedly?

"Stay here," I ordered, bolting to my feet and hopping into Toothless' saddle, swinging one leg over his black, scaly side and fixing my prosthetic foot carefully in the pedals. "Look after the others."

"Can you handle it?" Ruffnut's wordless acceptance of her role was surprising; I was so used to Astrid fighting everything I said that her response made me pause. Finally, I just gave her a curt, wordless nod, because I didn't want to lie with my lips. The truth? I didn't know if I could.

"Alright, bud," I prepared for takeoff, but before we could do

anything, the door to the hideout flew open, and Astrid burst inside, her features a mess of worry and fear. "Hiccup!" She practically teleported across the room to me, she moved so fast. "You heard, thank Thor! Everyone needs to saddle up their dragons, we have to move fast!"

"Wait, Astrid, what?" Obviously, she was okay, which was good, don't get me wrong, but she was moving so quickly I could barely keep up.

"The Outcasts found us. I don't know how, I just heard them blundering around."

"They didn't see you?"

"No, but I heard them. You told me they'd found this place once before, right?"

"Yeahâ€¦yeah, I did." And this time, there was no garden to stop them. They'd found us.

"C'mon, Ruffnut, wake your brother. We have to move."

Astrid mounted Stormfly, and it was only minutes later that Ruffnut and Tuffnut were ready to go with Barf and Belch.

"Hiccup? What's going on?" Eret's voice was slurred and slow when he talked, and I realized we had forgotten to wake him, but our noise and shouting must have.

"Outcasts," I explained, because I knew that would get the point across. "Do you think you can fly your dragon?"

His affirmative came in the form of a nod, without any hesitation, and he was up and on the Nadder's back in the space it took to blink.

"Wait." The blood was rushing from his face as he glanced at me. "The back doorâ€¦"

"I'll get it." I jumped off Toothless, locating the back entrance fairly quickly and pushing it open. "Everyone, out."

I rushed back to my dragon as Barf and Belch took off without a glance back, but the two Nadders hesitated at the door.

"What are you guys waiting for?" I demanded impatiently, seating myself in the saddle again. "At this rate, they'll have us!"

The three of us took off after the Zippleback, and before long, we'd caught up to the twins. I urged Toothless a little higher, just enough to give us cloud cover, but low enough to still see the island passing by at a rapid rate below us. A few minutes later, we were out on the open sea.

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 40: Falling

**A/N: Lame title. And lame ending. I just had a feeling I should get this up. **

* * *

><p>The smell of the open ocean was oddly comforting. It reminded me of the days back before all this crazy stuff happened. The days when it was just me and Toothless, us against the world, nobody else to lean on or look out for. Just us. Sometimes, I really missed those days. The days where my memory was intact. You know, the good old days.<p>

I closed my eyes, savoring the feeling of being in the clouds, and the warmth of the sun on my face, for one minute just forgetting everything but the way it felt to fly, how good it felt to let myself go, aware of nothing but the rapid extending and narrowing of the tail fin.

For an instant, everything was okay. I felt like I would be okay.

And then Tuffnut's voice jerked me back to reality. "Hey, so, did you ever get that food?"

"What?"

"You know, the food? You said you were going out hunting. I thought maybe you'd have a kill or two."

"We're running from _Outcasts_," Astrid's cheeks were going red, "and you're thinking about _food_? Tuffnut, could you have any worse timing?"

"I'm hungry!"

"You wouldn't be, if you'd just stayed with the others like you should have!"

"Yeah, but you got to go! Why couldn't we? It wasn't fair!"

"Hey, is that a ship?"

"Tuffnut, for the last time! This is not a party! All of you clamber to be around me like I'm bringing the damn life of it, or something!"

"You are bringing the damn life of it," Tuffnut told me. "I mean, running from Outcasts? Living in daily fear of our lives? What's not to love?"

"Guys, I think that's a ship."

"Sounds like a party to me."

"Guys!"

"What?" As one, we all turned to look at Eret, who looked pale and sick, and appeared to be flying his Nadder with some difficulty.

"There's a ship! And it's coming our way!"

"So? What does that matter?"

"Alright, listen, _nimrods_, " Eret's leg had clearly had no impact on his ability to insult us when needed, "what would a ship be doing so far out here? I mean, my island is pretty far away from the others. It's completely disconnected, and it's uncharted. Virtually no one knows it's there. So what's this ship doing so close by?"

"I don't know," Astrid shrugged.

"Maybe it's the Peaceables? They like to fish pretty far outâ€|"

"That's not the Peaceables. That's aâ€|" it was suddenly hard to spit the last word out. "Warship."

"I'm confused," Tuffnut broke in. "Is it the Peaceables or not?"

"No," I said.

"Oh. Okay."

There was a second of silence.

"Wait, then, who do we think it is?"

"Outcasts," I informed him.

"That's not good, is it?"

"No. It isn't."

"I don't know, though. You have to admit, their damage and destruction is pretty beautiful."

"Guys, focus," I snapped. "If they'reâ€"wait a second, what is that?"

"That looks like another dragon," Astrid replied tensely, her eyes wide and her face pale.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," Eret began mildly, "but doesn't that dragon look like it has riders on it?"

"Are we being attacked by air and sea?" Ruffnut looked scandalized, having grasped things quicker than her brother.

"No! Alvin would never use dragons, he hates them."

"But who else could itâ€"Hiccup!" Astrid broke off with a gasp of delight, turning to me, her blue eyes suddenly lighting up. "That's a

Thunderdrum."

"What?"

"It's your dad! It's Gobber! They must be coming back for the twins!"

"Oh, great!" I said, relieved. "That means, Ruffnut and Tuffnut, you two can go back with Dad and Gobber, and Astrid, you can join them if you like, while me and Eret hunker down somewhere safe!"

"Hey, wait, hang on, why does he get to stay with you?" Tuffnut demanded.

"Because he wasn't given orders to stay with the chief!"

"But the chief is so boring. Nothing ever happens on Berk."

"Nothing ever happens?" Astrid repeated incredulously. "Nothing ever happens? Oh, yeah, the Outcasts attacked last winter, our chief found his lost son after sixteen years, an ice dragon shows up and begins attacking Hiccup with everything he's got, Humongous sells Hiccup out to the Outcasts, Hiccup comes back to us after losing his memory, and with a wild story about a man with a man-eating garden!|ho, hum, really. Positively monotonous."

"Yeah. Exactly," Tuffnut replied, not getting it. "Positively monotonous!|month!|what did she say?"

I rolled my eyes. "Never mind. We're splitting up, that's final, everyone." I saw Tuffnut opening his mouth out of the corner of my eye, about to protest, but before I could even begin to hear his response, Toothless smacked me on the face with his ear "hard."

"Ow!" I shouted, rubbing at my cheek. "Toothless, what was that for?" But at that moment, I lifted my gaze and saw what. Our bickering had been the perfect distraction for the ship "which, for all our debate, actually was an Outcast ship" to strike. Arrows and axes and spears were flying, and Toothless actually flipped us upside down to avoid a particularly well-thrown axe.

I dangled uselessly for a second in the saddle, my arms up above my head until the danger had passed, and I righted myself.

I patted his head gratefully. "Good job, bud," I whispered before turning my attention back to the problem at hand: the barrage of weapons. We weaved through them pretty well, the axes little more than sea stacks we had to maneuver around, the arrows the birds that we couldn't hit, the spears the choppy waves that stung the higher up they went. We just needed to avoid them, and we'd be okay.

We were flying so fast that the inhabited islands were fast coming into view again "there were the Hysterics, and the Uglithug lands, and Outcast Island wasn't much farther away. Were they trying to lead us to Outcast Island? I was so caught up in my wondering that I never even saw the knife coming. From the moment that I saw that blade flashing silver in the sun, I was barely aware of anything that was going on around me. First, pain exploded on the side of my head, sharp little bursts of it going everywhere and nowhere all at once.

Blood poured into my eyes, blinding me, as I became aware that I felt weightless. And then I was falling.

I was falling, hands reaching blindly out to find Toothless, except I couldn't get to him. Pure fear clutched at my heart like a tight fist. Was Toothless okay? Would it hurt when I hit the ocean? Would I die?

Except I never hit the ocean. Warm fingers encased my hand, dragging me upward. "Are you okay, Hiccup?"

I never got the chance to answer before I fell again.

41. Seriously Hurt

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 41: Seriously Hurt

A/N: Welllllllll a new chapter. Much angst, so drama. I'm about to go eat, so I gotta hop off here. I can't believe I'm at 281 reviews! Almost 300! (Please make it happen please)

* * *

><p>Even as I fell, my thoughts were of Toothless. Even as the wind roared in my ears as it whipped by and people yelled above and below me, and seagulls cried out over the endless stretch of ocean, I was thinking of Toothless. If I was falling, if I had ripped completely away from the saddle, then surely he was falling, too. Yet this was not the carefree dive we regularly practiced â€" this was something else entirely, and I knew if I failed to get back to him in time, it would end in death for the both of us. I raked uselessly at the blood still pouring into my eyes, tinting my vision dark, making it nearly impossible to see through endless waves of red.<p>

More voices joined the relentless clamor above me, people telling me to grab hold, but of what? I couldn't see anything. I continued plunging into darkness, reaching out wildly, trying to find somebody, something, there was nothingâ€|

I was getting closer to the ocean, I could tell by the smell of salt, growing stronger and stronger with each passing second. And I could hear the waves crashing against the rocks, warning me, but I couldn't pull myself up, couldn't find anything to grab onto before my inevitable plummet into those icy watersâ€|

"Eret, Ruffnut, Tuffnut, you guys get Toothless out of there!"

I heard the words, even registered my dragon's name, but nothing made sense until I gave one last, desperate swipe at the blood blinding me, and the world suddenly came into focus. Provided I kept one hand there at all the times, blocking the stream, I could see a bit of what was going on, could see the clouds ripping away from meâ€|Toothless and I must have been very high up, I thought, for the

fall to take so longâ€¦what had they just been saying about him? If it involved my dragon, it was importantâ€¦

And then, suddenly, the terror was over. I fell straight into something so hard and thick that my head snapped back from the jolt, but as my hands explored the surface, I realized it was undeniably dry. Not water, then. Not the ocean. I cautiously opened my eyes again, brushing the blood back out of them to realize I was on the back of a dragon, and that up-and-down jolting was obviously the wings. "Astrid?" My voice came out raspy as I finally noticed the blonde braid catching the wind in front of me.

"It's okay, Hiccup, we're getting out. Everyone's safe â€" the others will catch up to us soon." But there was something in her voice that suggested that everyone wasn't safe.

I slowly leaned up on my elbows, realizing I was stretched out, actually laying down on Stormfly's back. Hastily, I forced myself to sit up, yet dizziness immediately engulfed me. I gulped air like I thought it was water, struggling to arrange my thoughts. "Astrid? Where are the others? Where's Toothless?" Icy dread settled in the pit of my stomach when I thought of him.

"I told you, they're okay." Yet her answer was too quick â€" was she lying, or just avoiding the truth? "They're catching up to us in a minute. A couple of them almost got captured by the Outcasts, and the others stayed behind to help out. Everyone will be okay, though."

"Okay." I'd just have to believe her, until somebody else came along who might actually give me some straight answers.

Another jolt from Stormfly's wings, and the sea and the sky tilted alarmingly, threatening to switch places. I had never been airsick before, and I found I did not enjoy the experience at all. My stomach gave a sudden churn and I thought I was going to lose whatever I'd eaten last before remembering I hadn't eaten anything at all for the last two days. If anything came up at all, it'd be stomach acids and nothing more. I worked to swallow to ensure even that wouldn't happen, but it wasn't easy.

Astrid threw a quick glance over her shoulder, into the steadily thickening fog behind us. "Where are they?" she hissed in agitation. "They should be back by now!"

"Are they okay?" I demanded of her, though I knew she wouldn't have an answer. I myself glanced backward this time, too, as if my gaze could somehow magically make the missing members of our party appear. Astrid's words replayed in my head again until I felt nearly sick. _"A couple of them almost got captured by the Outcasts, and the others stayed behind to help out." _A sudden thought occurred to me: why hadn't we stayed behind? I was glad Astrid, at least, was out of danger, but if the others could stay and help defend each other, why couldn't we?

At least if we were back there fighting, we'd know everyone was okayâ€¦it was unbearable not to know, even for those few seconds. What had happened to Toothless while I'd been falling erratically through the air? What had happened to him? And Eret, poor Eret, whose leg was only just now healing, whose sanity was returning in pieces,

who had suffered so much at the hands of Alvin, so much that he'd nearly gone insane, because he wouldn't step aside and let the Outcasts at me, wouldn't give them valuable information about me, because that was Eret for you, stupid and selfless and recklessly brave and completely, totally crazy, even without his senseless mutterings. And Gobber, who had been nice to me while I was on Berk, Gobber with his one leg and one armâ€|and the twins, who were too slow-acting to survive long in battleâ€|andâ€|and my dad, who I had barely known for longer than a few days now, my dad who I was supposed to remember but didn'tâ€|

"They should be." It took me a minute to realize Astrid was answering my last question. "Gobber and your dad are among the best fighters this world has ever seen â€" with those two on their side, there's no way anyone will get seriously hurt out there."

"Seriously hurt," I repeated softly to myself. But, looking at Eret, would anybody say he was seriously hurt? His leg was healing, he had been walking okay in the hideout earlier, even been able to run with a bit of a limp in his stepâ€|no, not seriously hurt, not on the outside. But he was injured in his mind, where it truly mattered, all the horrible things coming back to haunt him in the middle of the night, making him say crazy things about Outcasts and my leg and the fallsâ€|Looking at me, nobody would say I was seriously hurt.

Unconsciously, I rubbed at the sticky area indicating where the blood was still streaming from. It was beginning to dry now, after so much exposure to the air, but this hardly mattered; I looked back one last time in the fog to see if they had appeared yet, but they hadn't. "We have to go back for them," I muttered.

"No." Astrid's response came so swiftly that it seemed she'd expected me to say something like this.

"What?"

"I mean it. We're not going back. I was told to get you somewhere safe and look after you â€" I'm following my orders."

"Well, I wasn't given any orders," I told her. "So, why don't I just go back andâ€"

"On what dragon, tough guy?"

"â€|Toothless would listen to me."

"I'm sure he would, but he's not here." Astrid sounded immensely pleased with herself.

"Well, whatever. We should still go back! We have to make sure they don't need our help!"

"But if they don't, we'll just get in the way."

"And if they do?"

"They _don't_, " Astrid responded sharply. "You know, Hiccup, now you know how it feels for us, I imagine."

"What?"

"You know, when you just decide you can do everything yourself and decide to run off and leave us hanging and you decide you don't give a damn whether people care about you or not."

"Astrid, that's notâ€!"

"Look, it's the truth." She easily cut through my words. "It's awful, isn't it, when all you can do is sit there and worry and you can't do anything to make sure they're okay? That's what you do to us every time you and Toothless go off alone."

I fell silent, too rattled to speak.

Minutes passed before I regained the ability. "A-Astridâ€|" But I still had no idea what I was going to say.

"C'mon," she spoke over me, ignoring any attempt I tried to make at excuses. "We'd better find a place to settle."

42. Sick

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 42: Sick

****A/N: Nottttt my best title, huh? Sorry about that :P****

****My hands are freezing. I keep breathing on them to warm them up, but then I feel like that's dramatic, like I'm in one of those movies where somebody dies in the snow, so then I think I should just grab my mittens, but then I think about how I can't write with mittens on, or read, or anything, so then I think I should just leave them off entirely, so then they start feeling cold and numb again and I breathe on them again. Tis a tragic cycle, really.****

****Anyway, so, I'm kind of sort of maybe thinking about working to get some of my original work published? Like, just poems and stuff. I actually started writing fanfiction at five and six - so I've been writing a long time - and I stopped at eight, and started writing poetry at nine. I recently found the notebook that I put all my nine-year-old poetry in, and OH MY GOD, it was so horrible xD I believe I have improved. I hope I have. I've never actually shared a lot of my poetry with people before. My family has read a little bit, I guess...but I don't really share it. I normally write about personal shit, or HTTYD-inspired shit that I disguise juuuust enough so nobody can tell it's HTTYD, but if they've seen the movie and they look hard enough, then, yeah, they can tell. I don't really know why I'm telling you guys all this. I'm having a really shitty day, and I guess I'm just trying to think of other things. On a side note, I haven't yet gotten my hands on a copy of How to Fight a Dragon's Fury, so please no spoilers in the review section - only love and chocolate and other such things :) if you flame, please do so with good reason and use your powers responsibly. Shoot me a PM if you'd**

like to talk, tell me if my swearing bothers you, and please let me know what you think of the chapter. Reviewers get immense appreciation and a hug from this Hiccup. **

* * *

><p>Have you ever had a day that feels surreal?<p>

According to everything I've heard, this could be caused by a lot of things: lack of food (I couldn't remember the last time I'd eaten), lack of sleep (I considered myself lucky to get an hour of unbroken rest these days), dehydration (I'd only had a couple quarts in Eret's hideout), injury (did anyone miss the knife?! I felt like it was still embedded in my skull!), traumatic events (according to Wrinkly, I was just swimming in those), or stress (um, check!) could trigger it.

Maybe I was experiencing one (or all) of those things, but for whatever reason, whenever I tried to recall that day in my mind, everything just felt unreal. Every color was too bright and vivid â€" the sea, the sky, the clouds, the sun, Astridâ€"my eyes began to water, and I had to close them. Every sound was louder than it should have been â€" the cry of the seagulls, the crashing of the waves against the rocks, the noises of the dragon beneath usâ€"I winced at everything, feeling jumpy, woozy, scared, nauseated, paranoid, and nervous all at once.

To make things worse, colors kept trading places â€" I glanced down once, and the ocean had become as golden as the sun. Or the clouds kept turning blue. Blue clouds. Yellow water. White sky. White, like seagull feathers. At the time, I knew it wasn't right, but couldn't quite put my finger on why.

"You okay back there, Hiccup?" When Astrid spoke, her voice came out way too loud.

I winced. _Yeah. _

Silence reigned between us for a minute; I was extremely grateful for it.

"Hiccup?"

_What? _I resisted the urge to groan aloud. I didn't want to talk anymore. Everything hurt. Communicating and thinking and breathing and simply being. It all hurt.

"Hiccup? Are you okay?"

"Yeah." My voice came out really thick and kind of croaky, like a frog. I winced at the sound. "I told you that just a few minutes ago."

Astrid twisted to look at me, and her blue eyes looked weird. They looked like they were concerned for me. "No, you didn't."

"What are you talking about? I just said it like, two seconds ago. How could you not have heard it?"

"Umâ€"okay." She twisted around to look at the sky in front of us

again â€" it stretched on forever and ever, a beautiful blue blanket, limitless and endless. Maybe we could just keep flying, keep soaring in this endless blue nothingness, stay up here in the clouds forever. We'd never have to be bogged down with the normal, everyday worries of Alvin the Treacherous. Except maybe that was just normal for me. Maybe it wasn't normal for them. Either way, it was getting hard to think now. Maybe flying forever wouldn't be such a good idea anyway. I was starting to feel sick again, mostly from the speed. Gods, why couldn't Stormfly just slow down? I wanted to voice the request, but Astrid seemed okay with the speed, and I wasn't sure if I had the strength. I just sagged limply against Astrid for a minute, before another jolt from the Nadder had my stomach protesting so forcefully that I knew I was about to lose my lunch.

"Astrid, Astrid, please, please, can we slow down, please?" I probably sounded pathetic, but at the time, I didn't care â€" I just needed to get out of the air. Back to solid ground. Where I could vomit my guts up in peace.

"What?" She suddenly turned to look at me again, jerking my head off of her back. "_You _want us to slow down?"

"Yes." But she was staring at me, like I'd said something seriously out of the blue, so I added, "What's wrong with that?"

"N-nothing. I guess. Let's take it a little slower, Stormfly." She still voiced the request uncertainly, like she thought I was going to change my mind any second now.

"Thank you," I choked, shutting my eyes immediately after.

The whole world was spinning around me, and despite the fact that Stormfly had slowed, her wings still jolted me, and that wasn't helping matters. When a bit of sea spray splashed up onto my skin, the droplets felt strange, alien, on my skin. I shuddered. My skin hurt from how cold it was. And the noise â€" the waves and the seagulls â€" reminded me of just how very far from home I was.

Yet where was home anymore? I used to consider Outcast Island my home â€" I'd thought I was welcome there, that there were people who loved me there, but there weren't. There never were. And the one person who I'd thought would look after and protect me no matter what, had locked me in a cell and whipped me until thin lines of scarlet crisscrossed on my back in eternal marks, beat me until I bruised, red and purple and blue flowers blooming on my skin. And then I'd run away. I'd escaped.

I remembered crashing on Berk, too. I remembered my time in Dad's house, eating dinner and skirting around everything because I was terrified of telling the truth, of letting even a part of it slip. I remembered Gobber. I remembered Astrid.

"There!" Astrid sounded excited; her voice jerked me out of my thoughts and hurt my head again. I could almost feel her shoulder as she raised her arm to point to the island her gaze had settled upon â€" a big one, or so it appeared to me, with no buildings. No huts or watchtowers or anything. The place seemed well and truly secluded.

I held my breath as we went into a steep dive, and when we at last landed upon the shores, I fell gratefully upon the white sand,

breathing a shaky, quiet sigh of relief. Except Stormfly's flying wasn't the reason the whole world had been tilting crazily around me for the past few minutes; it was me. I was dizzy. Really dizzy. The sensation of spinning increased tenfold as I dropped to all fours, feeling my throat constrict as bile rose into my mouth, trickling past my lips and onto the sand. It was all I could do to wipe my mouth and swallow before my stomach gave a nasty churn, threatening to repeat the action.

"Oh, gods, Hiccup." Astrid put her hand on my shoulder, and I liked it too much. "Are you okay?" Her thin white hands looked strange against the dark brown of the fur of my vest.

"I'm okay." My throat hurt too much to talk more than that. "I'm okay." I repeated myself, in case she hadn't heard me, like last time. "Sorry I did that." At her confused look, I elaborated, even though I didn't want to. "Threw up. Stupid body. Never could keep anything downâ€¦"

She swept my hair back from my forehead, her blue eyes at once probing and tender. Her other hand went immediately to my forehead. Her fingers were cool. It felt nice against my blazing skin. Wait. Blazing? I was warm? I didn't feel warm. I felt cold. Too cold.

"You'reâ€¦" she let out a little breath before gasping, like she needed all her strength to get the next words out. I imagined the air she'd just exhaled seeping right back into her lungs. "Warm."

"Don't feel like it," I muttered. My throat hurt a little less now.

I could feel her fingers moving to the side of my head, whereâ€¦whereâ€¦the knife had grazed me. Right? It hurt under her touch. I reached to bat her away, but she held onto my wrists and forced them into my lap.

"You're hurting," I told her, but she ignored me; I was sure I sounded like a petulant child, anyway.

"Right." She drew in a deep breath. "I'm going to need to fix you up. I wish Gothi were hereâ€¦"

"I'm cold," I murmured. "And tired."

"I know, Hiccup." Astrid sounded gentler than I'd ever heard her before. She also sounded distant â€" she must be thinking. She wasn't really hearing me.

I fought to keep my eyes open. "We should find water. That'd be our first concern, right?"

Her blue eyes snapped back onto me. "Yesâ€¦"

I tried to push myself to my feet â€" if we were going to look for water, I'd better conquer the nausea â€" but the moment I was upright, the world dipped and spun crazily around me. I would have fallen, but before I could, Astrid grabbed onto me, placing an arm around my shoulders.

"You might want to slow down there, Hiccup," she cautioned, helping me settle myself back on the ground. "You can barely walk. I'd better go alone."

"No!" I didn't risk rising again. "No, you can't go alone! You could get hurt out there!"

"Uh, Hiccup," she brushed the hair out of my eyes as she talked. "You're not exactly going to be my knight in shining armor out there â€" you can't even stand upright, and you'll be throwing up every ten feet."

"Okay." I nodded weakly, pulling my knees up to my chest as I talked and resting my head on them. "I get it. I can't come with you."

I had the feeling I'd said something wrong by the way Astrid looked at me now â€" but all I'd done was agree with her. She was right. I couldn't come with her in this state.

"Astrid," I suddenly gasped out her name, turning my head away to retch over the sand once more, "I don't feel good."

Then I passed out.

43. Grief

Unbreakable

The middle of a war is not the best time for one boy to discover that he is not unbreakable. Sequel to 'Starlight, Star Bright'.

Chapter 43: Grief

**A/N: I finally tore myself away from School of Dragons long enough to write this. It is absolutely FREEZING D: like, I mean, I like the cold - I love the cold, and winter is my favorite season - but I was not built for it, I tell you. I actually have a cold intolerance, and the slightest change in temperature is enough to make me don a sweatshirt and socks. But winter is so pretty, and I just :3 I love it. Anyway. Hiccup is having like, a ton of angst in this chapter, huh? XD I love him. Hiccup, I mean. Canon or AU, he's just so cute.
**

* * *

><p>"Drink this, Hiccup, c'monâ€|drink it nowâ€|"<p>

This was the first thing I was aware of, this voice, quiet and insistent, easing the pounding of my sore and aching head. Then I registered that there was something cool and unarguably solid pressed against my lips, and for one wild moment, I thought it was somebody's lips, that I was receiving a kiss. But I had long since given up on ever finding a woman that could love me as I was, so I dismissed the idea as ludicrous.

"C'mon, wake upâ€|"

I wanted to open my eyes and respond, to look at the speaker and

speak back, but my eyelids were so heavyâ€¦I was so tiredâ€¦

"Hiccup!"

I groaned, a long, low, painful sound. "What?" As I spoke, I allowed my eyes to flutter open sleepily, showing the person above me that I was indeed awake. But in the brief moment between opening my eyes and closing them again, I saw sunlight, bright and blazing, glinting off metal, that solid, cold thing against my mouth.

"You need to drink nowâ€¦drinkâ€¦"

_Canteen. _As my brain slammed back into action, resistance was the only tactic I knew. "No!" I tried to scramble away then, but my arms were shaking, and my legs felt like Thor had left his hammer upon them, and I knew they wouldn't hold me up.

"Hiccup, Hiccup, calm down!"

_Calm down? _

"I won't drink it!"

"No, listenâ€¦"

"I won't! I don't like what it does to me, I'm not drinking it, I'm not drinking the stuff, I won'tâ€¦" My voice gave out halfway through the declaration; my throat was too dry and sore to keep going. And of course, my refusal meant nothing. Thor knew Alvin had forced the vile concoction down my throat whenever I didn't comply.

"It's not going to _do _anything to you!" The person sounded stressed and harried; they looked stressed and harried, I thought, and I knew I recognized them, but foe blurred into friend and danger blurred to safety, blue eyes blurring to brown.

"You actually expect me to believe that?" I was quieter this time; I didn't have enough energy in me left to scream. "He tricked me for a little while, but not againâ€¦not ever againâ€¦he fooled me once, and thenâ€¦then I was fooled againâ€¦and I'm notâ€¦I'm notâ€¦" I broke off suddenly, unable to keep going, coughing violently into my hands, spots of spit leaving my mouth to live on my fingers instead. I swallowed, readying myself to keep going, but the person in front of me had remained silent all this time, and suddenly I wanted to hear them speak, even if they spoke only false assurances of a world outside this one. "W-well?" It was hard to talk; it hurt, and every word scraped against my sore throat. "Go on. You're notâ€¦doing muchâ€¦much good here." I collapsed on the ground beneath me. "Alvin will be so happy."

"H-Hiccup, you're notâ€¦"

"I think a part of h-him likes it when Iâ€¦I give him trouble." I put a hand to my throat, wincing. "I think he thinks it gives him an excuseâ€¦to beat the living hell out of me." Was I saying this? Was I actually saying this stuff aloud, or was I just thinking it? I couldn't tell. But I couldn't make myself stop speaking, or thinking. I hoped I wouldn't get hurt too badly tonight, though â€¦" my throat hurt too badly to scream.

"H-Hiccup, waitâ€¦calm downâ€¦" I knew better than to trust a voice that shook. "Just calm down. Quit talking if it hurts." The person drew in a deep, shaky breath. They probably wanted me to save my energy for the noises of pain when the whip hit me. "Andâ€¦and I'm not giving you anything that will hurt you."

"I hope it does," I whispered; even this was a struggle for me. "Because nothing helps anyway."

Shaky fingers found my lips. "Hiccup, you need to take a drink. Please."

Now that word sounded all wrong, especially considering it didn't come from me. Normally it was me doing the begging. Either way, I pressed my lips together. "I don't want it."

"It'll help. It's water, just water."

"Justâ€¦just water?" I wasn't quite sure I trusted them, but a drink suddenly did sound appealing.

"Yes. Just water."

"Nothing you've added?"

"I wouldn't lie to you."

"Alvin would," I mumbled, or maybe just thought.

A canteen suddenly found its way into my shaking hands, and I blinked down at it in shock. I was being given a choice? Why weren't they forcing me to drink, or threatening me? I just stared down at the container for a minute, my hand shaking so wildly that the liquid within, whether good or bad, sloshed. I hesitated for a minute more before lifting it to my lips, and I tipped the contents into my mouth.

From the taste, I gathered that it really was water, just water. It was warm and tasted strange, but it soothed my burning throat. I didn't quit drinking until I noticed how light the container had gotten. It would be selfish of me to take this person's water when they hadn't lied to me or forced me to do anything yet.

"How do you feel now?"

"Better. Thank you," I admitted truthfully.

"Can you look at me?"

"Huh?"

"I need you to look at me, Hiccup."

"Okay." Now that I wasn't so thirsty, now that the pain in my throat was dying, I felt more exhausted than ever, and it was a conscious struggle to keep my eyes open. I met the blue gaze slowly, and when I did, I couldn't help the gasp ripping its way from me. It wasn't just that those eyes were extraordinarily pretty; it was also that they reminded me of someone else's eyes, someone I had known at another

timeâ€|somebody with blonde hair and a booming laugh and a skill with swordsâ€|somebody who smiled a lotâ€|Humongous.

The name seared within my memory; the fires of pain and icy hand of grief had not gone away. I remembered Humongous, remembered so much about him, remembered those blue eyes that would never open again gazing down at me once when I slept, murmuring that I would one day be freeâ€|I remembered that gaze as he taught me the correct way to hold a sword, a lesson that Alvin had never seen fit to give me. I remembered his voice, quiet and broken, as he related the events I couldn't recall. I remembered him taking a few minutes out of his every day on Berk to speak with me, to smile at me, to look at me in the kind of way that made me feel warm, because there was something within that gaze, something that told meâ€|had I not been suffocating under the weight of my own grief, I would have felt embarrassed at the realization. I had liked his smiles and kind looks, and I had loved his touch and his company and craved his stories because every little thing he did around me seemed to tell me that he was proud of me, that he approved of me, even when nobody else did, and it had made me feel so, so _nice_.

A choked sob ripped its way out of my mouth.

"Hiccup? Are you okay?" The blue eyes looked concerned now, and I looked away, because I couldn't bear to keep looking when Humongous was gone.

"Hiccupâ€|" They â€" well, I guess the voice sounded like a girl, so she â€" she started to talk again.

"Please," I interrupted, almost gasping with the effort it took to speak through the pain, as though the sorrow I felt was physical, "please, I just want to sleepâ€|please, let me sleepâ€|"

"Hiccup, wait, wait a minuteâ€"

"I'm tired," I whispered, letting my head fall back onto the ground behind me. "Please, let me rest, I'm so tiredâ€|I'm so _tired_â€|of_hurting_â€|"

* * *

><p>"How is everyone else?"<p>

"We're okay." The response was brief and dismissive. "Where's Hiccup?"

"Over there. He's sleeping, I couldn't keep him awakeâ€|I tried, butâ€|I did manage to fix up his woundsâ€|Thor, he had a lot of themâ€|" I couldn't tell if it was my imagination, or if the speaker sounded strangely choked.

"But he's okay?"

"I think so. He'sâ€|Chief, I don't know what to make of him. He feelsâ€|really warm, and I kept trying to get his fever down, but there wasn't a whole lot I could doâ€|he's sick, he's thrown up everything in his system and then someâ€|I gave him a bit of water earlier, but it was a struggle for him to keep it down. He'sâ€|he's delusional. He can't seem to remember where he is or what happened

every time he wakes up. He's beenâ€|talking."

"Good job, Astrid." The response was stern yet proud. "You may rest now, if you like." Even I recognized the dismissal in the voice, yet the other person â€" Astrid? â€" didn't.

"No, Chief, I can'tâ€"Hiccupâ€|" she began to protest, but the other interrupted.

"â€|is safe with me. I'm looking after him now. Astrid. I promise."

End
file.